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'THE NEGOTIATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY:

The final years of compulsory schooling in  
a multi-ethnic inner-city Comprehensive'

by David A. Gillborn, B.A.

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, October, 1987



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KEY TO TRANSCRIPTIONS

CAPITAL LETTERS	Denote emphasized speech or raised voice.
[Square brackets]	Background information or where speech has been paraphrased for clarity of understanding.
...	At the beginning of a transcript these marks denote that the quotation starts part-way through a statement.
	At the end of a statement these marks denote that speech trailed off.
	Within the body of a transcript denote a pause.
(...)	Material has been edited out.
—————	Transcription from a different interview/observation follows.
(field notes)	Where a quotation is taken from my field notes (written during or shortly after the interview/observation) rather than an audio tape transcription.

NOTE TO TABLES

In all calculations I have rounded percentages to the nearest whole number. Therefore, the total columns in tables may not always equal 100%.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis reports a case study of the final years of compulsory schooling in a multi-ethnic inner-city school (City Road Comprehensive). Data was collected during two years of intensive ethnographic field work, principally via informal interviews and participant observation.

Pupils in two mixed ability form groups were studied as they moved through the subject options process of the third year, throughout their fourth year and into the final year of compulsory education. A third mixed ability form group were also studied during the subject options process.

The thesis explores some of the school-based influences which shaped the pupils' experience of City Road.

Following a consideration of my research methodology, and a brief description of the social composition and academic organization of the school, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 offer a detailed analysis of the subject options process. Although the pupils' gained access to a majority of their original option choices, it was the senior staff who came to dominate the options system. However, form tutors and subject teachers also retained some influence over pupils' decisions. The options process represented a form of academic selection, resulting in significant differences between pupils' upper school curricula. Gender and the senior staff's perception of pupils' 'ability' were particularly important.

Chapters 5 and 6 turn to the pupils' experience of the upper school. In a modified form the processes of differentiation and polarization, described in previous case studies (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970; Ball, 1981), were seen to operate within City Road. The complex, negotiated character of pupil adaptations is examined, analysing the factors in the teacher-pupil relationship which placed West Indian pupils in a relatively disadvantaged position within the pupil population.

I conclude by considering aspects of the 'micro-macro' problem and highlighting the need for further research arising from this study.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To date my educational career has been negotiated with the help of many people. This is meant as a small 'thank-you' to some of the most important.

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While writing this thesis I shared an office with Suzy Harris, a fellow postgraduate. She has had the unenviable task of listening to my jokes when things were going well, and to my curses when they were not. I thank her for putting up with me and for all the help she has provided - I can only hope that Suzy has someone as understanding close by when she begins writing up.

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## INTRODUCTION

Between January 1984 and December 1985 I was engaged in intensive ethnographic field work in a large multi-ethnic inner-city comprehensive school, which I shall call City Road. As part of my attempt to maintain the anonymity of the subjects of this study, in this report all proper names will be replaced with pseudonyms (1). However, so as to allow secondary analysis of my data I will not disguise the gender or ethnicity of any individuals within the setting (2).

By law all City Road pupils were required to attend school until a point after their sixteenth birthday and by the time their compulsory education ended some had experienced very different school careers (3). A minority of pupils left City Road with a clutch of examination passes but the majority of their peers emerged with educational certification of little or no value in the post-school education and employment markets. Few of these differences were 'inevitable', many were negotiated. In addition to any differences in previous academic performance and the influence of certain factors beyond the walls of the school, the pupils' careers were the result of countless interactions and decisions during the moment-to-moment, day-to-day routine of life in the school. This is a study of some of the factors involved in the negotiation of educational opportunity in City Road Comprehensive.

My field work focused upon the experiences of a group of pupils as they moved from their third year subject option 'choices', through their fourth year and into the final year of their compulsory education. This thesis traces the negotiation of educational opportunity through the experiences of those pupils. Firstly, I will deal with the subject options process. This was a major turning point in many pupils' careers when decisions were made concerning upper school curricula which would influence the remainder of their time in City Road and have consequences for their future educational and employment opportunities. The latter part of the thesis focuses upon the pupils' careers in the upper school and in particular considers the nature and significance of the differing relationships with teachers

and peers which some pupils experienced.

The subject matter of each chapter is briefly summarized in the following outline of this thesis.

Chapter 1 places my research within the broad tradition of interactionist work in the sociology of education and acknowledges my particular debt to work which arose from a project at Manchester University (Hargreaves, 1967; Lacey, 1970) and subsequent research by Stephen Ball (1981). The chapter describes how and why my research design changed during the early stages of the project, outlines my methodological approach and considers some of the field work problems I encountered and the solutions which I adopted. The chapter ends by describing City Road Comprehensive and the composition of the research age grade.

Chapter 2 begins my treatment of the subject options process by analysing the roles and perspectives which each of the main groups of participants brought to the question of option 'choice', ie. the senior staff, subject teachers, form tutors and their pupils. The chapter traces the recent history of the City Road options organization and highlights the power of the senior staff who placed their own perceptions of pupils' "best interests" at the heart of the system.

Chapter 3 moves on from the discussion of participant perspectives to examine how option choices were decided in the face-to-face interaction of teachers, pupils and, in some cases, parents. The bulk of the chapter focuses upon the strategies used by the staff members who effectively dominated many option meetings despite the ideology of pupil choice. The sources and limitations of the staff's influence are examined and the chapter concludes by briefly considering the limited renegotiation which took place as the pupils entered their fourth year. These 'post-option' negotiations seemed most often to involve pupils at either end of the range of 'ability' and reflected the theme of academic selection which is taken up in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 4 concludes my discussion of the options process by drawing back somewhat from the minutiae of interaction in City Road and setting this study within

the context of previous work on subject specialization. In particular, the chapter focuses upon the association between pupils' experience of the options system and their 'identity' in terms of 'ability', gender and ethnic origin. In addition to highlighting the role of the options system as a form of academic selection the chapter also examines the complex of influences which reinforced patterns of gender specialization in the upper school.

Chapter 5 explores the processes of differentiation and subcultural polarization in the upper school. The nature of the academic differentiation in City Road was different to that encountered previously by Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981) but broad patterns of subcultural polarization were in evidence. However, the situation was extremely complex and a revised model of pupil adaptations across a continuum of involvement is offered following a critique of previous work on subcultural polarization.

Chapter 6 examines the significance of ethnicity as a factor in the negotiation of educational opportunity, in particular focusing upon the often conflictual nature of the relationship between white teachers and their West Indian pupils. The roots of the conflict are traced to the moment-to-moment demands upon teachers whose ethnocentric perspectives interpreted displays of Afro-Caribbean ethnicity as, at best, 'inappropriate', and, at worst, a challenge to their authority. The consequences of this situation are examined through case studies of individual pupil adaptations which highlight the size of the task which faced academically ambitious West Indians.

Chapter 7 concludes my analysis of the negotiation of educational opportunity in City Road. The chapter briefly summarizes my principal findings and draws attention to potential research problems which arise from this study. The chapter also includes a discussion of the importance of the wider social context of education which is of relevance to the continuing macro-micro debate in sociology.

## NOTE

1. In the case of Asian pupils the pseudonyms will reflect the form of proper name which was used by the pupil within the school.
2. Studies of ethnicity frequently encounter problems of definition, therefore I want to make clear how I have classified the subjects of this case study.

Information on the parentage of each pupil was gained through a variety of sources including written school records, the knowledge of the pastoral head of the research age grade and the pupils' responses to a questionnaire administered by the school's 'Section 11' teacher (see Appendix 1). This information was used to characterize pupils' ethnic origin in relation to four groups; West Indian, South Asian, Mixed Race and White.

I have used the term 'West Indian' to refer to those pupils whose natural parents were both of Afro-Caribbean origin. In almost all cases these pupils' parents had emigrated to Britain from the West Indies before, or shortly after, the child's birth.

I classed as 'South Asian' all pupils whose parents had emigrated to this country from the Indian subcontinent. Grouping pupils into such a broad 'Asian' category can hide more subtle differences between groups distinguished along religious, caste or geographical lines, however, within City Road the categorization was a fair one; the majority of these pupils were Muslim and, as noted in Chapter 6, many of the Asian males were connected via a complex system of shared friendship choices.

Pupils who had only one natural parent of Afro-Caribbean origin were widely known in the school as "half-caste", indeed, this was a term by which they sometimes described themselves. However, the term has been widely criticized as a racist category which infers the inferiority of anyone so-labelled. Throughout this research I shall refer to such pupils as being of 'mixed race'. This is by no means a perfect label since it might erroneously be interpreted as suggesting the existence of 'non-mixed races'. However, as Wilson (1981) has noted, there seems to be no better alternative and for the sake of continuity I have decided to use the term in this report.

I have classified as 'White' all pupils who were not accounted for by any of the previous categories. This was a very heterogeneous grouping which might more accurately be referred to as 'white European', since in addition to those of UK parentage, it also included a handful of pupils of Irish, Scandanavian and Italian parentage.

3. I use the term 'career' in a way that has become increasingly familiar in interactionist sociology. Hence, career is no longer confined to the notion of a series of more or less objectively defined steps (usually along an occupational hierarchy) which an actor may (or may not) achieve during his/her life time. Writers associated with the 'Chicago School of Sociology' were among those most influential in widening the use of the term to include what Woods has described as the "subjective career", ie. "the moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions and the things which happen to him" (Everett Hughes quoted in Woods, 1983: 13).

As Erving Goffman observed:

"One value of the concept of career is its two-sidedness.



One side is linked to internal matters held dearly and closely, such as image of self and felt identity; the other side concerns official position, jural relations, and style of life, and is part of a publicly accessible institutional complex."

Erving Goffman (1961: 119)

Hence I will consider the pupils' school 'careers' not only in terms of their movement through the final school age grades (each carrying new demands and turning points in terms of potential academic achievement) but also in terms of their changing experience of the school and the meanings attached to relationships with peers and teachers.

## CHAPTER 1: METHODS AND CONTEXT

### The background to the study

#### 1.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

#### 1.2 PEOPLE, PRACTICALITIES AND GROUNDED THEORIZING

- a) The biography of a research proposal
- b) Getting under way
  - i. Gaining access
  - ii. Negotiating a pupil sample
- c) The generation and analysis of ethnographic data
  - i. Field roles
    - The researcher as an ex-pupil in the setting
    - Age, gender and ethnic origin
  - ii. Techniques of data generation
    - Observations
    - Interviews
    - Audio tape recordings
  - iii. The analysis of ethnographic data

#### 1.3 CITY ROAD COMPREHENSIVE

- a) The composition of the research population
- b) The organization of City Road School
  - i. The pastoral system
  - ii. The academic system
  - iii. Industrial action

#### CONCLUSION AND NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

## CHAPTER 1: METHODS AND CONTEXT

### The background to the study

"It doesn't seem that long ago that we were sat here as first years. I remember, four years ago, saying how quickly it would go before you were leaving this school. I remember saying things like how many people will be suspended and expelled, how many people would be pregnant and how many people would be in detention centres and so on. And you all had a look of amazement ... and yet, they've all come true."

The pastoral head of the research age grade addressing a fifth year assembly

While each individuals' biography may seem filled with coincidence and chance it is often true that careers, in school and elsewhere, follow certain discernable patterns. Indeed, much of the sociology of education has been concerned with identifying the influence of different variables upon patterns of experience and achievement within educational systems. Yet despite the regularity with which a proportion of pupils fail academically, truant from school or get pregnant, educational careers are not pre-determined. Neither are they freely chosen. In a very real sense, pupil careers are negotiated.

The relationship between pupils and their teachers is commonly conceived of as one of subordination, in which the adults have a monopoly of power. In practice, however, teachers and pupils are engaged in a process of continual negotiation. The pupils may not have many official powers but through the use of certain strategies they can influence much of what goes off in a classroom, including the amount and type of 'work' which is done (Woods, 1983: 127-49). This is not to say that the relationship between teachers and pupils is an egalitarian one; the former continue to control access to 'knowledge', and hence to the educational certification which, given the current economic climate and high rates of unemployment, may crucially influence an individual's future life chances (Goacher, 1984).

It is through the day-to-day interactions of school life that pupils' educational careers are shaped. Some interactions are clearly identified as being of

vital importance, for example, the choice of subject options was presented as the most important decision yet in the lives of the pupils. Other interactions seem more routine, for example, the setting and marking of homework, the grouping of pupils into particular classes for lessons and the identification and punishment of wrong-doers. Yet it is in these interactions, routine and otherwise, that the goal of equality of educational opportunity may be realized or frustrated (1).

Educational opportunity is not something which is 'given', rather it is won or lost through negotiation.

Negotiation "is all about power" (Woods, 1986: 162) and some groups have greater power than others: their resources and position in society, in both economic and cultural terms, may place the members of some groups in a relatively disadvantaged position. This thesis attempts to identify some of the processes which lay behind the educational experiences of pupils in a single school. I am concerned to highlight some of the numerous negotiations which helped shape pupil careers, to analyse the perceptions and interactions which led a minority of pupils to leave with a clutch of examination passes while the majority of their peers emerged with educational certification of little or no value in the post-school educational and job markets.

Among the problems which I shall consider are;

- 1) How it was that some pupils studied an upper school curriculum of very high academic status while others spent their time in 'sink' subjects with little or no prospect of meaningful certification?
- 2) Following subject option decisions many teachers expected some pupils to 'settle down' whilst predicting that others would 'go off the rails': to what extent did this occur and why?
- 3) Why was the West Indian pupil-white teacher relationship so often characterized by conflict and how was it that some West Indians succeeded academically despite such a situation?

These are some of the questions, but before offering my findings it is

necessary to consider how I generated and interpreted my 'evidence': that is the role of this chapter.

My research took place in a mixed, multi-ethnic inner-city comprehensive school. I spent two years talking to teachers and pupils (and occasionally to parents) and watching the routine day-to-day interactions of school life. I focused upon a sample of pupils as they moved through the subject option process (during their third year), through their fourth year of secondary education and into their final year, when they were entered for external examinations. The design of the research project, my actions during the field work, the quality of the data generated and the analysis presented here were influenced by many factors, the most important of which are examined in this chapter in order that the theoretical, methodological and evidential basis of this work may be clearly understood.

Subsequent sections of this chapter locate this study within a wider tradition of qualitative work, consider the interplay between the methodological and practical concerns which shaped my research, and characterize the organizational and social structure of the research setting itself. In this chapter I want to consider some of the problems which I faced and the consequences of the solutions which I found. Hence, this chapter is not an exhaustive commentary of what I did during each stage of the fieldwork. However, such detail is important and I have included a chronology of the research fieldwork in Appendix 1.

## 1.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

In Britain, since the early 1970s, there has been a significant increase in the amount of educational research which has been of a qualitative nature. A concern to understand the interaction of individuals and the processes at work within schools, via direct observation and/or in-depth interview, has established an alternative,

and potentially complementary, approach to the large scale sampling and statistical techniques which characterized discussions about the tripartite educational system. Yet qualitative research is by no means 'new'. As many researchers, including Ball (1981: xvi), have noted, the concern to understand the meanings which participants bestow upon the actions of themselves and others was a central part of Max Weber's sociology, and can be seen to underlie the empirical work of the Chicago and Manchester schools, both of which applied broadly anthropological approaches to the study of modern urban phenomena.

"The same patient methods of observation which anthropologists like Boas and Lowie have expended on the study of the life and manners of the North American Indians might be even more fruitfully employed in the investigation of the customs, beliefs, social practices, and general conceptions of life prevalent in Little Italy or the Lower Side of Chicago..."

Robert Park 1925 (quoted by Downes and Rock, 1982: 54)

A characteristic of the Chicago school which Park helped establish was a readiness to conduct research in the field; to watch, listen and be part of the life of the group under investigation. Some of the workers most closely associated with the Chicago school applied what Stephen Ball has termed a "soft-line" approach to participant observation, ie. they "emphasize the necessity of the observer's presence but without specifying the need to do what the researched do" (Ball, 1985: 25). My own research falls under this category, I watched and spoke with teachers and pupils throughout the routine of their school lives but never presented myself as anything other than "a researcher from the university".

As I will show below, my research grew out of a personal concern with questions of education in a multi-ethnic society and was shaped by a variety of influences. In relation to previous work in this area my research may be seen as adding to the tradition of school case studies which have been conducted in this country over the last three decades. Although the case study method is well established in certain fields, such as Psychology, it has only recently been taken up by significant numbers of educational researchers. Among the most prominent works are those

carried out by members of a research team which was based in a combined department of Sociology and Anthropology at Manchester University. For example, the studies by Colin Lacey (1970) and David Hargreaves (1967) of a boys' Grammar and Secondary Modern school respectively. The work of the Manchester school has influenced many later studies in this field. For example, studies by Ball (1981), Hammersley (1980) and Burgess (1983) have investigated particular aspects of the educational experience through detailed study of individual cases. In the case of Stephen Ball the links with the Manchester school were particularly strong since Colin Lacey acted as his doctoral supervisor (Ball, 1981: xxi).

I was largely unaware of this rich tradition when I made my original application for research funding, however, as my work progressed the findings and ideas of others increasingly began to impinge upon my analysis. This is reflected in the following chapters where I have tried to explicitly acknowledge my debt to previous works and place my own analysis in the wider context of research in this field. For example, my concern to chart the influences upon pupils' school careers is shared with the earlier work of Lacey, Hargreaves and Ball. In particular, the organization and character of the research school, as a comprehensive which taught the majority of subjects in mixed-ability groups, allows a continued examination of some themes in the "cumulative research programme" which Martyn Hammersley (1985: 246) has described these works as representing. More generally, I share with many school ethnographers a concern to understand the processes at work in an educational setting, processes which may have critical consequences in terms of the goal of equality of educational opportunity.

As already noted, my research attempts to understand something of the processes at work within the educational system through the detailed study of a single school. The main advantages of this method concern the detail in which a single researcher can hope to investigate the life of an institution, gaining insights to the complexity of perspectives and interactions which might be hidden from larger scale

quantitative work. However, a common criticism of the case study method is that the researcher's "selectivity is not normally open to the checks which can be applied in rigorously systematic inquiries such as large scale surveys - it tends to be personal and subjective" (Nisbet and Watt, 1980: 7). It is in response to such criticisms that ethnographers increasingly offer accounts of their methodologies and research experiences, in order that the systematic and rigorous nature of their research may be established, allowing the merits of their observations and analyses to be more properly judged. It is with this aim that I present the following account of my methodology.

## 1.2 PEOPLE, PRACTICALITIES AND GROUNDED THEORIZING

With the increasing use of qualitative research strategies has come a willingness to accept that the researcher cannot hope to investigate a setting without in some way affecting it, "...we are part of the social world we study" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 14). As the accounts of other ethnographers have demonstrated (eg. Burgess, 1984a; Burgess, 1984b; Ball, 1985), carrying out ethnographic research is a social process as much as it is a technical one. In addition to the problems of deciding what might constitute 'data' and how best to collect it, the researcher enters and becomes part of the social world which s/he is studying, indeed, the researcher is the principal tool of data collection. The ascribed characteristics of ethnographers, the way they dress and speak, and the quality of relationships which they establish within the setting may have very real consequences for the kinds of data which they generate. These factors require ethnographers to practice 'reflexivity' throughout the entire life of the study: researchers must be conscious of the ways in which their presence and actions within the setting may be interpreted by other actors and have an influence upon their behaviour.



From the moment I received financial support, and began the detailed planning of my research, my attempts at reflexivity began (although, at the time, I was unaware of the term). Some of the complexities and dilemmas which arose are summarized in this part of the chapter, which outlines the events and decisions which are essential to an understanding of the design and execution of this piece of research.

a) The biography of a research proposal

I spent my own secondary school years in a mixed 11-16 comprehensive school which streamed each year according to 'ability'. The school population was multi-ethnic but I had little contact with the West Indian pupils who seemed almost always to be placed in the lowest forms. Although reasonably successful in academic terms I did not enjoy school. This may go some way to explaining my continued interest in education as a matter for study: school had never been an 'easy' place to be and perhaps this helped me to think of education in more critical terms as a student.

My original research proposal developed from an interest in the different theoretical positions which exist within the field of multi-ethnic education. This formed the basis of a dissertation, submitted as part of my work towards a BA degree in Sociology. The continuing debate over the alleged educational underachievement of West Indian pupils as a group, formed an important part of that work. I was struck in particular by the lack of any detailed attempt to get 'inside' a multi-ethnic comprehensive school, to study at first hand the processes which might lead to West Indian underachievement. I saw my research as an opportunity to fill that gap. I was especially keen to study teacher expectations, pupil subcultures and the classroom strategies of the participants. This was to be achieved through a combination of ethnographic techniques, using informal interviews with staff, pupils and possibly parents, in conjunction with classroom observation carried out over a period of approximately eighteen months in a single multi-ethnic comprehensive

school.

My original title for the proposed research project was The perceptions of teachers and pupils, and their consequences for West Indian Underachievement.

The original design focused upon two groups of pupils; one drawn from the third year of secondary education when the research began (during the spring term), the other from those pupils entering the school as first years in the third term of the study. Each group would be chosen to facilitate the comparison of West Indian and white pupils' school experiences.

However, once I received financial support for the project, began reading around the subject more fully and discussing the work with my supervisors, it became clear that, for a number of reasons, the principal areas of interest and the design of the project were too vague to act as a basis for beginning any field work.

Several potential problems emerged. For example, West Indian underachievement and the perceptions of teachers and pupils covered too wide an area to approach in an unstructured way. This meant that a number of methodological decisions would have to be made before entering the research setting. This conflicted with one of my basic aims, i.e. to remain flexible enough to adapt the research to any situations or influences which emerged as bearing on the achievement of different groups of pupils (another facet of reflexivity).

A further fact which could not be ignored was that ethnographic research of this kind is dependent upon receiving permission from a variety of official bodies (such as the Local Education Authority (LEA) and the school's Governors), and on the co-operation of staff and pupils in the research setting. I anticipated that the original research design would be difficult to explain to the gatekeepers who controlled access to the setting, and to participants within the school, without causing a certain amount of suspicion and even hostility. The underachievement of West Indian pupils is understandably a 'sensitive' subject with many people, including teachers, pupils and parents. It seemed likely that even gaining access to a school would be difficult, based on such a politically sensitive issue.

In addition to these problems, the research had to reconcile the organization of the academic year in English secondary schools with the maximum timetable allowable for the research (dictated by the conditions of the sponsoring award from the University of Nottingham, which offered finance for a maximum of three years). Consideration of these dual external constraints, and the problems involved in taking the original design any further, led to a new research design and title.

The conditions of the sponsoring award meant that realistically I had to conclude the intensive field work within two years, so as to leave myself sufficient time to begin writing up this thesis. This was a constraint which could not be ignored. Similarly, a point in the educational career of secondary school pupils had to be found which offered a satisfactory 'way in' to the study.

An excellent solution to these demands was found in the subject option choices which are made in the majority of state secondary schools around the age of 14. These decisions, made towards the end of the pupils' third year, can have consequences for the whole of their subsequent career in education, since they determine a large proportion of the academic timetable in the upper school and usually lead to external examinations. The small body of existing work on option choice (especially Woods, 1976, 1977, 1979 and Ball, 1981) suggested that it was a vital time for both staff and pupils: a period when decisions are made, both explicitly and covertly, which might "channel" (Woods, 1976) certain pupils towards subjects and examinations of very different statuses. Indeed, I could remember agonizing over my own options, less than a decade earlier, and recalled the kinds of negotiations which had to be endured before I was able to alter one of my original choices.

The options process supplied a focus for the research that had been lacking. Schools tend to plan their handling of option choice to varying degrees and the machinery they operate to deal with this stage of the pupils' educational careers offered a relatively structured process which might be more easily accessible to an

outsider than more 'routine' points in the school calendar.

By using the options process as a starting point for the research, a modest longitudinal design was possible within the external constraints noted above, ie. following one group of pupils throughout their options decisions, and beyond through their fourth year and into the final year of secondary education when they would be entered for their external examinations. Although the intensive field work would have to end during the age grades' fifth year, I could maintain contact through occasional visits and use their performance in external examinations as a final measure of educational achievement (2).

This revised research design not only offered clearly defined start and end points for the field work, but also allowed me the freedom to follow any particular processes or occurrences which might have emerged as being important while the research was in progress, ie. the principles of "grounded theorizing" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) could be followed, striving to maintain "reflexivity in the relationship between analysis, data collection and research design" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 174). The wider area of concern was reflected in the revised title of the project, which I retained throughout the field work phase of the research: Influences on pupil careers: 14-16.

Although the design and title of the project no longer gave prominence to the question of West Indian underachievement, this did not reflect a loss of interest in this area. Indeed, I hoped that the project might still contribute to that field of study in some way. However, I decided not to draw attention to the full extent of my interest in ethnicity in any contact with actors within potential research settings; a point which must be considered further.

I introduced my research to all actors in the setting as being a study of a group of pupils which was interested in "anything which affects their/your time in school". I did not emphasize my interest in ethnicity for two reasons. Firstly, because of the wider concerns of the revised research proposal and secondly, because I reasoned that if I raised matters of ethnicity it might 'lead' the respondents in

a way which would affect their answers to my questions. For example, pupils might accuse teachers of racism because they 'knew' I was interested in that field, or alternatively, the teachers might have avoided certain topics of conversation in my presence, being suspicious that I was intent on reporting 'racism'. I allowed teachers and pupils to raise these issues as they felt necessary but I was never the one to introduce ethnicity into a conversation or interview. However, once a respondent raised such matters I pursued them as I would any other point. For example, during one interview a teacher asked me:

"Are you doing anything on the ethnic groupings in the school?"

I replied, "Not especially, but I'm interested in ANYTHING which might affect how the pupils get on." The teacher then went on to explain the reasons behind his question and his own views on ethnicity in the school. In this way I was able to probe the actors' perspectives on such issues while minimizing the risk that the discussion arose from my own concerns rather than those of the interviewee. I also used this approach with matters of gender.

Before I had even approached the gatekeepers of potential research settings, therefore, I had made a number of decisions which influenced the focus and presentation of the entire research project. I then faced further problems as I attempted to begin the field work phase.

b) Getting under way

i. Gaining access

Some of the most daunting problems facing any ethnographer arise out of the need to access a 'suitable' research setting. It is almost certain that the researcher will already have formulated some notions about what s/he is interested in, ie. what Malinowski has referred to as "foreshadowed problems" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 28). Such concerns often mean that the ethnographer has a particular 'kind' of research setting in mind. In my case, I wished to study both white and West Indian pupils who attended a comprehensive school. I have explained my interest in ethnicity above, and wished to locate the research within a comprehensive since this is the dominant form of educational provision in this country; accounting for 86% of pupils in maintained secondary schools (Central Statistical Office, 1987: 57).

Gaining access to any institution can take a very long time. In the case of a state funded secondary school, initial access depends upon the co-operation of the LEA as well as the Headteacher. Approaches to such gatekeepers must be well prepared.

Permission had already been given in principle by the LEA as part of the preparation of the original research design before submission for a sponsoring award. However, before seeking formal permission from the authority and approaching individual schools, I wanted to clarify the design of the research proposal. In order to gain some insight into the workings and timing of the options decisions in schools, I wrote informally to the master concerned at the school where I had been a pupil between the ages of eleven and sixteen. I still lived near the school and from local contacts I knew that the teacher who had co-ordinated option choice when I was a pupil, Mr Jennings, was still a member of staff.

My letter to Mr Jennings was on headed University notepaper (which I felt showed that I was serious about the work), but was handwritten so as to maintain as much informality as possible. I explained that having secured a degree in sociology,

I was now involved in postgraduate research, and was interested in subject option choices. The letter requested an interview with him so that I might benefit from his experience in handling options in a large secondary school.

Mr Jennings (who had since become a member of the school's senior staff) phoned me as soon as the letter arrived and we arranged an interview for later that week. Having discussed my hopes to follow an age grade from their options through to their examination entries, and spoken at length about the options in that school, I asked him whether he could suggest any schools which might be willing to co-operate with me. He immediately offered me access to that school (City Road Comprehensive). He said that he would speak to the Headteacher that afternoon, but anticipated no problems. Later that day I rang the school and it was confirmed that permission had been granted - a sign of the importance which the school's senior staff assigned to option choice and of Mr Jennings' influence within the setting.

One of the main reasons for Mr Jennings' enthusiasm for the research was that it could feedback into the school and possibly help improve the options machinery. I emphasized that such feedback might not be possible until near the very end of the research, and that the field work would involve following pupils for approximately two years. He accepted this and was genuinely pleased that he could help out. Therefore, within a week of writing to a personal contact I had gained access to a suitable mixed, multi-ethnic comprehensive school. This was an enormous help in getting the research under way, it meant that I could begin my field work before the school started to prepare the third years for their option decisions - I could witness the entire process. However, at this stage I had still done no more than secure my entry through the school gate, access to particular meetings, lessons and groups of teachers and pupils had yet to be negotiated.

## ii. Negotiating a pupil sample

The character of the research setting (City Road Comprehensive) has obvious consequences for the level of generalization that will be appropriate when

evaluating the findings of this research. Therefore, in order to minimize any further restrictions, I attempted to ensure that my sample was as representative as possible of the school's pupil population. However, I also had to work within certain constraints defined by my status as a lone researcher and the organization of teaching in the school.

Each age grade in City Road was made up of eight mixed ability form groups. Each form had been created by the Year Head (Mr Martin) on the basis of assessments from their previous school. The form group was assigned a tutor who marked the attendance register and was seen as their first point of contact with the school's pastoral system: if the pupil or their parents had any problems or queries, in the first instance, they were expected to contact the form tutor (3).

During the first three years of their secondary education the form group often remained together for several lessons. However, after the subject specialization of the option choices, in the upper school the forms were usually together for 'form period' only, ie. a thirty minute slot at the start of the day when the tutor would take the register, talk to the class, let them do homework or simply talk amongst themselves. By the time I entered the school each form had a history of its own and had sometimes established a particular reputation amongst the staff. This was something which I had to take into consideration.

Another factor in the negotiation of a sample was that for some activities the age grade was split into two halves and timetabled separately. While this occurred less frequently in the fourth and fifth years, it was necessary to bear the possible consequences in mind.

Given these arrangements I decided that the most suitable strategy was to follow at least two mixed ability forms throughout the options process in the school, if possible drawing one form from each half of the year. Each form took its initial from a letter in the school's name, hence one half of the year was made up of 3C, 3I, 3T and 3Y; the other by 3R, 3O, 3A and 3D.

During the first weeks of field work Mr Jennings acted as my 'sponsor' within



the school. He contacted the pastoral head of the third year (ie. my research age grade) on my behalf and asked his suggestions about form teachers who would be willing to co-operate. The Year Head then approached three form tutors and set up a meeting for me with each of them. Mr Jennings' help was of very great importance during this time since it enabled me to contact relevant people within the school without compromising the existing authority structure: he knew not only who could help me, but also, whose role demanded that they be notified. However, there was a potential threat of 'tainting', ie. other actors within the school might have associated me so closely with Mr Jennings that they would only tell me things that were suitable for his ears. In an attempt to counter this possibility I always impressed upon interviewees the confidentiality of the work and following my initial introductions Mr Jennings soon lost his role as sponsor, as my growing familiarity with the setting allowed me to make my own contacts.

I spoke with the three tutors whom the Year Head had approached and secured permission to introduce myself to their form and observe a form period. This gave me a chance to actually see the forms and, among other things, to note their ethnic composition, since I did not have a breakdown of the year on an ethnic basis at that time.

I noted that one of the forms I was 'offered' in this way, had no West Indian pupils at all, yet I knew that most forms did include West Indians. In addition to this, the physical lay out of the form room meant that it was only possible for me to sit at the front of the class. While the form teacher was very co-operative, the layout alone made the form unsuitable as a subject for observation during the options since I anticipated that a certain amount of option work was to be done by the teacher during form periods. However, I remained on good terms with the teacher concerned and was able to use this form as a pilot for the sociometric questionnaires which were used during the study.

The other two forms which I was offered did not strike me as exceptional in any way (which I felt was a good point) and the layout of their form rooms allowed

observation without presenting any problems as far as seating was concerned. I was also struck by the fact that while one tutor was already using the form period for work specifically aimed at option choice, the other was leaving this to a much later date. As the term progressed, it became clear that these two forms would offer an excellent comparison based on the different amount of preparation each form teacher was attempting. In addition to this, the two forms (3C and 3D) were drawn from each half of the timetable.

I began to regularly sit in on 3C and 3D form periods. As well as allowing me to watch any work that they did on option choice, this gave me an opportunity to get to know the pupils and for them to become familiar with me. However, when I finally received specific breakdowns of the third year by gender and ethnic origin in each form group, two forms stood out as being atypical of the year. The first of these had an equal number of boys and girls: in an age grade where just over sixty per cent were male, this form was the only one to be split equally between the sexes. The second form (3A) stood out because among the boys there was an almost equal number of white and ethnic minority pupils (six and seven respectively). In every other form the pupils of ethnic minority parentage were a minority of the form as a whole and within each sex.

Both of these forms seemed likely to prove to be interesting studies in their own right, however, I could only add one of them, 3A, to my sample. There were a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, I wanted to keep both 3C and 3D in the sample. I had already spent some weeks observing 3D's form periods where representatives of various departments would give brief talks about their subjects with a view to the options, and I wanted to follow this form through to see the effect of such work on their eventual choices. I also wanted to keep 3C in the sample; it included a group of three West Indian girls and two West Indian boys, one of whom was officially on the verge of being expelled. I was keen to follow these through the options and hopefully create the possibility of using them as sponsors into wider friendship groups in the age

grade.

By keeping both 3C and 3D in the sample I had very little time to interview all the pupils in an additional form before the options decisions were officially due to be made. Indeed at one point I considered interviewing only half of a third form, however, this would have created more problems than it solved and I decided to include the whole of form 3A.

In the light of my foreshadowed problems form 3A elected itself as a part of the sample because its ethnic composition offered an unusually high proportion of ethnic minority males. This was of importance firstly as a potential study in itself, of social relations in a single form, and secondly because it significantly improved the sample's coverage of ethnic minority pupils in the age grade. In addition to these factors, I had already spoken to the form teacher (Mr Palmer) informally. He had expressed support for the research and suggested that his form would be "a good one to study" because "they're a real mixture ... you've got some in there that can barely read and others who are brilliant" (field notes). Therefore, during the option choice process, my field work focused upon three mixed ability forms, 3A, 3C and 3D. However, when the age grade were fourth years I wanted to interview a smaller group of pupils in more detail about a wide range of subjects. This led me to concentrate on forms 3A and 3C only during the final stages of the field work (4).

Therefore, although I tried to apply the principles of theoretical sampling by representing the range of experience and characteristics within the age grade as a whole, more practical (but no less important) factors also played a crucial role in the negotiation of a pupil sample. For example, even the seating arrangements in a classroom had to be weighed as an important variable.

c) The generation and analysis of ethnographic data

i. Field roles

Earlier in this chapter I stated that the researcher is the principal tool of data generation in ethnographic research, it is appropriate therefore that I begin this section by reflecting upon my own identity within City Road Comprehensive.

The researcher as an ex-pupil in the setting

I have already noted that my status as an ex-pupil of City Road lay behind my initial contact with the staff member who acted as my sponsor during the early stages of the field work. However, there was evidence that being an ex-pupil had also aided my acceptance by other key members of staff within the setting. I should emphasize that I was no model pupil: I was not a disciplinary 'problem' but academically, in what was then the highest of the streamed forms in my age grade, I did no more than hold my own, I was certainly not a 'high flier'.

None of the form tutors to whom I was originally recommended as a researcher had been in the school when I was a pupil, yet on the first occasion that I met them every one mentioned that I had attended the school. This perturbed me a little because I was worried that my identity as an ex-pupil of the school might somehow detract from my status as a researcher: my greatest fear was that respondents might not take me seriously, hence I decided to play down my past in the school and, for most of the field work, never revealed it myself. However, the form tutors were not mocking in their enquiries, rather they seemed genuinely interested in my thoughts on how the school had changed. I began to realize that rather than detract from my status as a researcher, my identity as an ex-pupil of City Road actually aided me in contact with staff during the initial phases of the research.

Qualitative research usually depends upon the observer/interviewer being

able to convince their subjects that they can be trusted. Professionals tend to view 'strangers' as a potential threat. For example, Howard Becker has reported that, during his doctoral research, most of his teacher interviewees treated him as "a representative of the general public" for whom things often had to be justified or even hidden (Becker, 1951: 25). This was not the case for me in City Road. I had been presented by Mr Jennings and the Year Head as 'one of ours', someone who had experienced the school at first hand, and therefore not a stranger. Hence, I was quickly taken into teachers' confidences and trusted with very sensitive information, not only about pupils and parents, but also about other staff.

Given that I soon became aware that my status as an ex-pupil was having a positive effect upon my acceptance by staff, it now strikes me as particularly foolish that I did not trust the pupils with the same information. In fact one or two pupils from my case study forms were present at an open evening when Jennings mentioned who I was to a gathering of third year parents. However, no pupils raised this with me in interviews and, still clinging to my fear of not being taken seriously, I chose not to tell the pupils myself.

I can find little rational explanation for this course of action now, suffice it to say that at the time I feared anything which might adversely effect my relationship with the pupils. I felt that some of them may have assumed that a past pupil who chose to come back to the school (for whatever reason) must have liked the place and I did not want to distance myself from any pupils that disliked City Road or its teachers. However, towards the end of my field work I did reveal my past to some of my case study pupils; typically I would reply to a comment by saying something like, "It was the same when I was here". Their response supported my growing suspicion that my earlier decision had been a mistake; they always reacted with great surprise and pleasure, and I now feel that I missed an excellent opportunity to establish a rapport much earlier than was sometimes the case.

Although I now feel that I may have been over cautious, my past as a pupil of City Road was a facet of my identity as a researcher over which I was able to exercise some control. Also, my upbringing in the same area of the City meant that I experienced a socio-economic background which was broadly similar to that of the pupils. However, every individual is subject to certain ascribed characteristics over which they have little or no control, yet the demands of reflexivity require the ethnographer to be aware of how these characteristics might influence the subjects' perceptions of the researcher, and consequently, the quality of the data which can be generated.

In my role as researcher, I entered City Road as a twenty-one year old, white male. My age, gender and ethnic origin each presented potential problems.

#### Age, gender and ethnic origin

A person in school in their early twenties is often assumed by pupils to be a student teacher, or at least, 'new to the game'. I feared that some might assume that, like student teachers, I was a potential source of humour in classrooms. However, from the moment I entered the school I made it clear to all pupils whom I met that I was not a teacher. In particular I stressed the confidentiality of my work and its likely timetable. As the field work got under way I became a familiar sight not only around the school, but in certain form rooms: the novelty of my presence quickly wore off and the pupils routinely accepted my being around the place. In fact my age proved to be something of a bonus insofar as it helped me to maintain informal conversations with the pupils: I often knew the television programmes or musical styles which they discussed and was able to take some part in arguments about the merits of one popular group over another.

Like several school ethnographers before me (eg. Martyn Hammersley, 1984: 43; Lynn Davies in Ball, 1985: 29), I found that the pupils addressed me as

they did the staff: hence, they called me "sir". This did not indicate any confusion on their part, they certainly knew that I was not a teacher.

Although I had introduced myself to the pupils as "Dave Gillborn", I sensed that they were more at ease simply referring to me as "sir". All adult males in the school were addressed in that way, and so it was only natural that I should be. To have insisted on being called by my first name might have worked against my acceptance as a routine part of their school lives.

I also feared that my age might prove to be a problem in relationships with staff members who could have resented being probed about their practices in the school by someone who was himself barely old enough to teach. I suspect that some members of staff with whom I had little contact during the research may have harboured such thoughts, however, I had no such problems with the teachers with whom I was in most frequent contact. The older members of staff often remembered me from my past in the school and did not see me as a potential threat whose competence needed to be challenged. In my relationship with some of the younger members of staff my age proved to be a help insofar as we often shared common interests and tastes.

My gender posed a clear threat to the research in that it might adversely affect the kinds of relationship which I could establish with female pupils in the setting. There were certain issues which I could not expect female pupils to easily discuss with me. For example, in some interviews I asked about the pupils' social lives outside school and felt that I could legitimately probe the details of the out-of-school experiences of male pupils which might have reflected upon their actions in, or perceptions of, City Road. This was not possible for the female pupils, with whom I felt I could only conduct a comparatively superficial inquiry in such areas. However, while it was certain that there were taboo subjects between us, I was surprised by some of the admissions with which pupils trusted me. For example, when I asked a couple of girls why they had not chosen a particular subject

during the options, they revealed that the male teacher of this subject was prone to "stare" at one of them. There was an element of embarrassment as they told me this and it was said in all seriousness - evidenced by the fact that one of the girls felt the need to emphasize the confidentiality of the interview:

"You better not say any- play the tape to anyone."

The vast majority of interviews did not touch on such potentially sensitive areas, and although it was certainly the case that my gender could not always be eliminated as a fact within the research, I was able to build up very strong relationships of trust with many of my case study pupils, regardless of gender.

I thought long and hard about the problems which might arise as a result of my ethnic origin, for example, if any ethnic minority pupils were experiencing problems which they identified as resulting from the perspectives and actions of white teachers, they might well assume that a white researcher would not be sympathetic to their plight. Also, I was aware of a growing resentment of white research of 'black' problems amongst some members of the Afro-Caribbean communities in both America and Britain, for example:

"When we focus upon the amount of change in the lives of black people which has occurred as a result of educational research, we find very little. We do find, however, that the white researcher has gained fame among his peers and has moved on to a more prestigious academic rank ... His graduate students find the work grist for theses and dissertations - these too become published and the cycle repeats itself."

Stanley Crockett (1973: 82)

When I began formulating a research proposal I had not given any serious thought to the possibility that I might be accused of exploiting the subjects of the study (whatever their position, age, gender or ethnic origin), yet the accusation is a fair one. I am a white researcher attempting to lay the foundations for an academic career partly through a study of the position of ethnic minority pupils in



a white dominated school. I could not predict what I would find (indeed my initial hypotheses concerning the role of ethnicity proved to be far too simplistic), neither could I guarantee that my findings would have any effect on the 'real world' of education in this country.

Despite these reservations I maintained my interest in ethnic issues. I took solace from the belief that white teachers might be more willing to discuss matters of this sort with a white researcher. It was certainly the case that many teachers spoke to me quite frankly about issues related to 'race', however, I have no evidence that this was a function of our shared ethnicity.

Upon entering the setting I could only hope that ethnic minority respondents (whether pupils or parents) would not show resistance to the research, indeed, as I have already discussed, the research design underwent very significant changes because of the 'sensitive' nature of research in this area.

Once in the field I felt that my ethnicity was much less of a problem than I had originally feared might be the case. As I have noted, I never introduced ethnicity as a variable in any discussion, but when an interviewee did so, I followed it up as I would any other comment. A number of pupils introduced 'race' as a factor during interviews, most often as an explanation for treatment which they thought unfair. Typically the 'victims' of such treatment were claimed to be West Indian pupils, however, the accusers were of all ethnic origins.

Only once did I feel that my ethnic origin might have been a barrier to rapport: the incident occurred during one of my pre-option interviews when I was discussing teachers with a group of boys, of whom a minority were white. A white pupil suggested that a teacher had victimized the group because he was "a racist". Two of the West Indians present reacted very strongly to this: one stared at the white pupil as if he had transgressed some unwritten rule, while a second (who was sharing a table with the 'informant') kicked his shin.

Three months later I interviewed the same pupils about their experiences during the options process. After the interview the acknowledged leader of these boys,

Paul Dixon (a West Indian), approached me and launched into a detailed description of his often conflictual relationship with the teacher who had been accused in the earlier interview. Paul raised the issue at a point when I thought the interview had finished, and it was obvious that, in contrast to the earlier interview, he was now confident about discussing the matter with me.

In my analysis of the second interview I identified two factors which seemed to lie behind this development. Firstly, Paul was now much more familiar with me and he knew from experience that I did not report what anyone had told me. Secondly, I had spent a great deal of time observing within the school, witnessing form periods, assemblies, open evenings and official option meetings between staff and pupils, as well as generally watching the life of the institution. This seemed to be a key factor, Paul knew that I had seen events which he considered proof of his accusation:

"...you've been in our class right, now ain't you sir?"

It is important to note that neither of these factors directly concerns my ethnic identity, rather, they focused upon my credibility as a trustworthy observer. I now consider that my own ethnicity was not as big a handicap as might have been anticipated. I feel that I succeeded in developing relationships of trust and co-operation with almost all of my case study pupils, regardless of their gender or ethnicity. I can only hope that this work repays their trust.

## ii. Techniques of data generation

Simply being in an institution, listening and watching the day-to-day life of the setting is an important source of ethnographic data. However, during the life of most projects the researcher will want to study particular aspects of the setting, and may use a variety of data sources. In the course of this study I have used a number of documentary sources, such as confidential records and school publications, in addition to the design and administration of a number of

sociometric questionnaires. Where such sources are referred to in this report I will detail the techniques of collection and analysis used. However, the majority of this thesis is based upon data generated through interviews and observations, and it is to these which I now turn.

### Observations

My observational technique was very unstructured: having gained permission from the relevant gatekeepers I would simply sit in a corner of the room with my note book in front of me and my small 'pocket' tape recorder on the floor by my side, concerned to capture whatever I could of the events in the setting.

In classroom situations, with the teacher's permission, I would begin the first observation by quickly introducing myself to the pupils, emphasizing that I was not a teacher and that anything which I saw or heard would be treated in confidence. In subsequent visits to a classroom I would simply sit in a convenient spot without any further interference in the life of the group.

When an observation involved a private conversation between a parent and a teacher, such as during the options process or at an 'open evening', I would briefly introduce myself to the parent and ask their permission to sit in on the meeting. Having explained my general interest in the school and the confidentiality of my work, permission was granted on all occasions.

During observations I usually relied upon the small audio tape recorder to capture the detail of verbal interactions. I would scribble down snatches of conversations verbatim but in classroom situations I devoted most energy to watching how those in the room interacted with each other. As soon as possible after each observation I would go through my field notes adding more detail, often using tape transcripts to add full accounts of certain verbal interactions.

### Interviews

In my working notes I would categorize almost all conversations with staff, pupils and parents as 'interviews'. Such meetings could take place in corridors, on the street, in someone's home or even on a bus. However, for the purposes of this section I will use the term 'interview' in reference to the more settled, often pre-arranged, meetings in which I spoke to actors in the school. The majority of such interviews took place in a private setting where I could be alone with the interviewee(s): teachers could usually be seen in empty classrooms or offices, and in the case of pupil interviews I was very fortunate that one of the year tutors, whose form I followed throughout, allowed me to use his office as often as I wished. This supplied me with a setting where I could feel at ease with the pupils, which was easily reached within the school, and which guaranteed freedom from eavesdroppers.

Almost all staff interviews were arranged in advance and carried out on a one-to-one basis. The length of such interviews was usually limited by the organization of the school day, which was broken down into teaching periods of fifty-five minutes. However, on some occasions teachers were 'free' for consecutive periods and this allowed for longer meetings.

I had to see pupils at a time which was convenient for them (during the normal school day) and for their teachers, ie. I did not wish to absent them from lessons. The solution to this lay in the thirty minute form period which began each school day: if I arrived early I could ensure that the pupils' attendance had been recorded before leading them to the interview room. This usually restricted the length of the pupil interviews to a maximum of around twenty-five minutes. However, there were exceptions to this, for example, following his expulsion from the school, I spent an hour or so interviewing one pupil at his home.

The limitation on the length of most pupil interviews, plus the need to see many pupils at a similar point in their school career, meant that many pupil interviews were carried out with small groups of between two and five respondents.

whom I initially selected from the form on the basis of seating positions. I reasoned that pupils were most likely to sit with friends, in whose company they might be more relaxed.

The majority of both staff and pupil interviews were only loosely structured. As a guide I would have a few questions or areas of interest scribbled onto a piece of paper, but I would try to let the interviews develop as naturally as possible, only returning to specific issues when the conversations moved too far from the theme of the interview or when time pressures dictated (5).

#### Audio tape recordings

The majority of interviews were tape recorded. Before the interview got under way I asked teachers or parents for their permission to use the tape recorder, explaining that the tapes would only be heard by myself and that they would help me by removing the need to take too many notes. I did not allow the pupils any choice in the matter, but did give them the same assurances about confidentiality, stressing that I would disguise identities in any final report.

The audio taping of interviews offered a number of advantages over the use of field notes alone. For example, I could listen to each interview and make detailed transcriptions of what had been said. This ensured that I did not misquote anyone and provided material which had an immediacy offered by few other forms of data. However, the use of audio tapes raised a number of potential problems. Despite my assurances concerning confidentiality, three or four interviewees seemed worried by the tape recorder. There seemed to be a sense in which something captured on tape was felt to be less easily disputed if the need arose, and hence more dangerous, than something written in a note book. For example, one teacher showed considerable unease when I asked permission to use the tape recorder. I said that if she felt that the machine would inhibit her I would sooner not use it. Subsequently, in the machine's absence, she went on to detail a number of serious complaints about the schools' senior staff.

It should be stressed that the above example was an extreme case, on most occasions people consented to being recorded and because of the machine's size (smaller than a paperback book) I was able to place it out of their eye line before continuing. By putting the recorder out of sight, and using it during all the initial observations, the machine quickly ceased to be a cause for comment and became almost routinely accepted as a part of my persona in the school.

In fact, the presence of the tape recorder proved to be a positive aid to my interview technique. The recordings allowed me to monitor my own performance as an interviewer by checking that I had not led the interviewee by unconsciously 'cueing' them as to my interest in particular areas. As I have noted above in relation to my classroom observations, by using a tape recorder I was freed of the need to constantly scribble notes concerning what people had said: this allowed me to reflect upon what was being said and to explore themes as they arose in interviews. Also, by minimizing the amount of note taking in interview situations, the tape recorder helped act against my signalling the interviewee as to what I took to be important through the amount which I wrote down.

### iii. The analysis of ethnographic data

As I have already noted above, from the outset I was determined that the research should remain sensitive to any developments (both within the setting and in my perceptions of its processes) which might arise during the field work, ie. I aimed to employ the principle of "grounded theorizing" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) by making my data collection responsive to any emerging concepts or hypotheses. In order to achieve such a goal the researcher must be able to gain some sort of overview of the work whilst still engaged in data collection. However, ethnographic work generates such masses of interview and observational data that simply keeping up with the routine of filing away each piece of material can become difficult. Fortunately, my preparatory reading convinced me of the need to carefully consider how I was going to manage my data, and this laid the foundations for a key aspect of

my approach to the problems of analysis.

I approached the analysis and documentation of each interview and observation in a standard way, beginning with an account of what had happened (my field notes and/or tape transcripts). I then went through the data jotting any thoughts or observations in the margin. I would pull these comments together, under descriptive headings, into an initial analysis of each interview or observation. Building upon William Foote Whyte's "column" approach (1960, reprinted in Burgess, 1982a) I would summarize the setting for the interview (eg. interviewee, time and date) and my analysis of its content on a title page. The whole of the interview and its documentation were then filed together under a single code number. By keeping a copy of each title page I could find any interview or relevant piece of data relatively quickly.

However, as my files became greater in number a manual search through title pages became increasingly time consuming. A solution to this problem was found in the use of a microcomputer. The information in each title page could be typed into a form that the machine could store and then search at any time. By consistently using certain phrases or words when referring to particular areas of interest or developing hypotheses, I could ensure that each relevant interview or observation would be shown to me whenever I searched the index using that word or phrase. For example, whenever I noted anything which might have been of relevance when considering the role of pupil gender in the setting, I would ensure that I included the term 'gender' in that entry. When asked to search for the word 'gender', the computer would display each incidence within the index. If my accompanying remarks suggested that the reference was worth investigation I could then use the code number to consult the whole interview or observation for more details. Similarly, in just a few minutes I could find every entry which related to any named actor in the school.

Because of its ease and speed of use the microcomputer encouraged me to constantly look back through my files whenever I dealt with a new piece of data,

thus I was able to build up a picture of how pupils' careers in the school were progressing. Similarly, I was able to interrogate my files for instances which might support or refute any hypotheses which arose from published work or from my own experiences within the setting. Having clarified what my existing data could tell me, I was in a better position to judge the merits of further investigation of particular issues.

Hence, I was able to improve my collection, storage and analysis of data by using a microcomputer. However, as several qualitative researchers have recently emphasized (Conrad and Reinhartz, 1984) the computer is merely another 'tool' which ethnographers can use, it cannot, and should not be expected to, do the ethnographer's job for him/her. The interpretative, imaginative elements of qualitative research cannot be programmed into the machine. This is a simple fact, not romanticism. I remained responsible for the collection, categorization and interrogation of my data. The "leap of imagination" which Woods (1985: 52) speaks of in reference to the task of theorizing remains the responsibility of the field worker and writer. Although some programs are now specifically aimed at the needs of ethnographers their authors stress that the computer can only help with the more "mechanical" aspects of qualitative work, the researcher must do the thinking (Seidel and Clark, 1984: 123).

### 1.3 CITY ROAD COMPREHENSIVE

City Road Comprehensive lies a few minutes walk from the centre of a large Midlands city. The school covers in excess of twenty-five acres and, when the research began, housed around one thousand pupils (between the ages of eleven and sixteen) and more than sixty full-time teachers.

City Road became a comprehensive school in the early 1970s and draws its pupil population from the surrounding area, which is predominately working class.



Consequently the school has gained something of a 'tough' reputation locally, though City Road is not seen to have any 'special problems'. For example, unlike some other schools in the city, it has not been subject to accusations of racial discrimination from a local Afro-Caribbean pressure group. Generally City Road has a reputation which is no better or worse than the majority of the inner-city's schools.

a) The composition of the research population

As a comprehensive school, City Road was charged with responsibility for the education of pupils drawn from a specific catchment area which surrounded the school. Place of residence was the prime determinant of entry to the school and no means of selection were exercised. However, like many such schools, City Road's pupil population did not offer a very 'comprehensive' cross section of social class backgrounds (6). The majority of the school's pupil population were drawn from two large council-built estates, located within a district of higher than average rates of unemployment (7). City Road was very much a working class school; of my two final case study forms, only approximately 13% of pupils were from non-manual backgrounds (this compared with approximately 30% of children under 16 in the entire county and 20% of children under 16 in the City district: 1981 Census). 15% of the two final case study forms were of one parent families (this reflects a more common pattern; in 1985 14% of families with dependent children were headed by a lone parent: Central Statistical Office, 1987;46). An additional 15% of the final two case study forms had no parent in work. Unfortunately I was unable to gather such data on the research population as a whole. However, I had no reason to believe that my case study forms were in any way exceptional, and indeed, comparable figures emerged from a larger sample of the age grade, who were questioned by members of a team from the University of Lancaster (8).

The social class composition of the school's pupil population had a number of consequences; in recognition of its potentially greater teaching problems the school and its teachers received a marginally higher rate of financial support/reward. Less

tangible, but perhaps more important, the feeling that the school received a relatively 'poor' pupil intake had very real consequences for the expectations of the teachers. At all levels of the staff body I found the teachers likely to claim that "you can't expect much from our kids" (field notes). The feeling that the school's intake was likely to perform below national averages was taken for granted and directly influenced many teaching and organizational decisions which could, in their turn, lead to the fulfillment of the staff's prophecy. For example, Chapter 2 details the rationale behind the options organization and shows how beliefs about the quality of pupil intake affected the design of the option choice pattern in a way which restricted the number of 'academic' subjects open to many pupils.

As I have already noted, there was an over-representation of male pupils in the research age grade. This pattern was not repeated throughout the school's other age grades and there was no obvious reason why girls should be in the minority in my research year. For example, the age grade which left the school as the research began was almost equally split between pupils of either sex. I concluded from this that the distribution was not due to the influence of any variable which might systematically distort the proportions of male and female pupils who attended the school.

In terms of ethnic origin, West Indian pupils accounted for approximately 9% of the research age grade, South Asian for 7% and mixed race pupils for 5% of the research age grade. Therefore, the remaining white European group accounted for the majority of the age grade (around 80%). However, there was a sense in which the numerical dominance of white pupils in the age grade was not appreciated by actors within the school. In conversations and interviews both teachers and pupils (of all ethnic origins) seemed to over-estimate the proportion of ethnic minority pupils in the age grade, and although small in number, the ethnic minority pupils were a significant part of the pupil body (9).

b) The organization of City Road school

i. The pastoral system

As I have already noted, each pupil was placed in a mixed ability form at the beginning of their career in City Road. These form groups were the basis of the school's pastoral system. Each age grade was appointed a Year Head and Year Deputy who oversaw the work of their form tutors and were responsible for monitoring the welfare and progress of each pupil in the year. It was school policy that the Year Head and Deputy should always be of the opposite sex, and it was interesting to note that throughout the research the senior position was filled by a male teacher in each of the five age grades. This reflected the general position of female teachers within the wider authority structure of the school (10).

Any serious problems of achievement, discipline or home circumstances could be passed on from the Year Head to a member of the school's senior staff, ie. the Headteacher, three Deputies and a Senior Teacher. These teachers were responsible for particular areas of school organization and policy in both pastoral and academic matters.

It was in relation to their pastoral roles that I first met the majority of the teachers who were most important to this study, ie. members of the senior management team, and the Year Head, Deputy and tutors of the research age grade itself. In addition to their pastoral concerns, members of the year teams also carried full teaching responsibilities within academic departments, and I was often able to use them as informants or sponsors who could help me to understand the perspectives of individual departments within the school. The complexities of the relationships between senior staff and subject departments, and the problems faced by form tutors who had to split their time between pastoral and academic work cannot be examined fully in this work, however, it is necessary to offer a brief summary of the organization of teaching in the school.

## ii. The academic system

Teaching in City Road was organized around eight subject areas; Mathematics, English, the Humanities, Physical Education, Science, Modern Languages, Expressive Art and Craft, Design and Technology (CDT). The Humanities, Science and CDT areas united a number of specialisms under wider faculty organizations, the remaining curriculum areas were administered as individual subject units throughout.

Each lesson was usually taught by a subject specialist. This involved the pupils in moving between classrooms at the end of each teaching period. During their first three years in City Road the pupils received the majority of their tuition within their mixed ability form groupings, only being broken up into groups which were "set by ability" in a minority of subjects. This pattern coincided with the practice in at least one-third of all state comprehensive schools in this country. It should be noted, however, that the official figures are somewhat dated and it may be that City Road was one of a majority of schools who organized teaching groups in this manner (11).

In City Road only three curriculum areas (Mathematics, Science and Modern Languages) introduced setting before the option choices of the third year; a pattern replicated in many English comprehensives (HMI, 1978). Each of these subjects used a combination of examination results and teacher assessments to place pupils within a series of hierarchically designated teaching sets. Following the subject specialism of the option choice process many more subject departments attempted to introduce setting: once again this replicated the national trend, with teachers viewing selection as the most appropriate basis for pupil grouping in preparation for external examinations (Reid et al, 1981). However, because of the limits of timetable allocations few subjects were able to introduce setting across the whole, or even part, of their pupil take-up in the upper school. As later chapters of this work show, these differences were often related to subjects' contrasting statuses in the eyes of senior staff.

### iii. Industrial action

During my two years of field work in City Road the state educational system suffered two national disputes between the major teaching unions and their employers, the LEAs. This meant that for the majority of the study the school was subject to various forms of industrial action by members of staff. The majority of staff were instructed by their unions to withdraw 'goodwill', ie. they no longer took part in activities which were not officially part of their job, and for which they received no pay. The withdrawal of goodwill forced most pupils off the school grounds at lunch time and resulted in the cancellation of several after-school occasions where parents would normally have had the opportunity to discuss their childrens' educational progress with members of staff.

The school also suffered a number of strikes. These involved several members of staff in withdrawing their labour for a period ranging between one half-day and three full working days. Some members of other unions would not 'cover' for striking colleagues and on at least twenty occasions pupils in the research age grade missed at least half a day's schooling (12).

For many months the industrial action was a fact of life in City Road and it is impossible for me to be certain as to how far it may have influenced my account of the school. Throughout this work I have explicitly acknowledged those instances where the industrial action seemed to be of direct relevance, for example, during the subject option process the action forced significant changes in the organization of pupil choice. However, I feel that much of my analysis holds true regardless of the industrial action: for example, my arguments concerning the gender stereotyping of subject choice, the polarization of pupil perspectives and the importance of ethnicity as a factor in teacher-pupil relations. It should be noted that I studied the school in the absence of industrial action almost as much as in its presence, the processes upon which this work focus may have been affected by the action but were not solely generated by it.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis is based upon two years of ethnographic field work carried out in a single, multi-ethnic inner-city comprehensive school. In recognition of the highly 'personal' nature of this form of research this chapter has outlined the development of the project, highlighting the various influences upon my own interests as a researcher and upon what actions seemed appropriate within the setting itself. Many considerations, ranging from the politics of ethnicity to the seating arrangements in a classroom, have shaped the research and I have attempted to make clear the principles and practicalities which guided my collection and analysis of data.

In this thesis I have chosen to focus upon how educational opportunity was negotiated during the routine of face-to-face interactions during the pupils' school careers. This theme runs throughout the work and has guided the selection of data. My goal has been to explore the perspectives of the actors involved, to examine the constraints acting upon them within City Road and to highlight the consequences of their interaction in terms of the pupils' experiences of the final years of compulsory schooling, culminating in examination achievement at 16-plus.

The next three chapters offer an analysis of how the subject options process was organized and experienced within City Road. Subsequent chapters will show this to have been a crucial factor in the negotiation of educational opportunity within the school.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. In recent years the concept of 'Equality of Educational Opportunity' has been subject to a number of re-interpretations (Evetts, 1973: 55-71; Fowler and Melo, 1974). Currently the most common understanding "is one which compares the relative chances of access to schools and qualifications which were, substantively as distinct from formally, open to the children of different social classes" and groups (Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980: 202; original emphasis). Hence, the concept now stresses relative (not absolute) equality of outcome as indicative of opportunity.
2. During my research field work it was decided that the existing types of

examination should unite under a single system, to be known as the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). However, when my research sample sat their external examinations the majority of subject departments were still entering pupils for one or both of the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) and the General Certificate of Education (GCE). The latter was officially aimed at the top 20% of the ability range, while the more recently introduced CSE was meant to cater for the next 40% (Mortimore and Mortimore, 1984: 21). Further details of these examinations are included in the following chapters, where appropriate.

3. Unless specified otherwise, I use the term 'parent' to refer to the adults who were the natural parents and/or legal guardians of City Road pupils.
4. A series of fourth year interviews covered a number of very personal issues and I decided to see the pupils individually. The amount of time which these interviews demanded meant that I could not see each pupil in three forms. I spent several weeks trying to decide which pupils to follow, however, as I discussed the problem with my supervisors I realized that to be selective within any of the forms could risk my relationship with all the pupils. I decided therefore to concentrate the remaining field work on 3A and 3C only. Again, similar criteria to the ones which I had considered in negotiating the original sample were taken into account, for example, of the three forms, 3D had the lowest proportion of West Indian pupils, therefore I was able to concentrate on fewer pupils, but maintain my coverage of ethnic minority respondents.
5. As I have already mentioned immediately above, the pupil interviews which I carried out towards the end of the age grade's fourth year were exceptional in that the nature of the subjects which I wished to cover demanded a private interview with each pupil on a one-to-one basis. Also, the range of questions and the use I wished to make of the data meant that I had to adopt a more formalized approach. Hence, I used a schedule of questions which structured the interviews, but also allowed for reflexivity in relation to incidents which had occurred before, and things which arose during, the interviews. The schedule and the rationale behind it are reproduced in full in Appendix 2.
6. The term 'social class' is much misused and before continuing I should clarify my use of the term in this thesis. In general 'social class' is understood to refer to groups of people who share similar life-styles and chances. Members of a household are usually classified in relation to the occupation of the (male) head of the household. There is no single classification of occupations agreed upon by all users, however, in Britain many writers now determine 'social class' in relation to the six broad categories of occupation used by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS, 1980: x-xi), ie.

I	Professional
II	Intermediate
III	Skilled:
	(N) non-manual
	(M) manual
IV	Partly skilled
V	Unskilled

Even this very crude classification is often simplified into a distinction between groups I to III(N) inclusive and III(M) to V inclusive. This non-manual/manual divide is typically interpreted as representing a

distinction between the 'middle-class' and the 'working-class'. This use of the term is the one which I will use throughout, not because it has any great scientific merit, but because it most closely matches the common-sense categories which the actors used within the school and the local community.

7. According to the first local authority figures on unemployment by district (published as the research age grade left compulsory schooling), the City Road district was among those with the highest rates of unemployment in the county. The unemployment rate was approximately 13% for the county as a whole, compared with a rate in the lower 30s for the City Road district: only one district in the county had a rate higher than 40%. It should be noted that in calculating these figures the term "unemployed" was used with reference to those people who were registered as unemployed and claiming unemployment benefit.
8. It was not feasible for me to gather data on social class from every member of the research age grade in person and I anticipated that a questionnaire would not produce reliable answers. However, I was fortunate that the age grade which I followed throughout my research, and from which I drew my case study forms, was also part of a much larger piece of research being carried out by members of the Department of Educational Research at the University of Lancaster. I am indebted to Professor Sally Tomlinson and Hilary Tomes for permission to quote the following data on the social class composition of the research age grade during their third year of secondary education.

Of a sample of 119 City Road pupils, the Lancaster team found that 25% had no parent in work, 19% were members of single parent families and 14% were of a non-manual, white collar, professional/managerial background.

A breakdown of the social class background of the pupils, present throughout the research field work, in my two final case study forms is presented in Appendix 3.

9. Full breakdowns of the research population by gender and ethnic origin are included in Appendix 3.
10. During my first year of field work, women teachers accounted for 40% of the school's full time teaching staff. However, only 20% of senior staff and 29% of Heads of department were female. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the perspectives of key decision makers, and hence official school practice, often reflected this male bias.
11. Appendix 4 offers a brief account of the available evidence on the extent and nature of mixed ability teaching in English comprehensives.
12. It is impossible to calculate precisely how much disruption the industrial action caused: schools often had less than 24 hours warning before a strike and so, even visiting the school an average of three times a week, I could be unaware of some action.



## CHAPTER 2: PERSPECTIVES ON OPTION CHOICE

### The preparations for subject option choice in City Road

#### 2.1 SENIOR STAFF: The view from the top

##### a) Senior staff and the options system

- i. The decision to reorganize the options
- ii. The "new" options organization
- iii. Industrial action: the 'contingency' options organization
- iv. Senior staff centrality and the ideal of pupil choice

##### b) Senior staff and the "coaching" of pupil choice

#### 2.2 SUBJECT TEACHERS AND THE OPTIONS SYSTEM

'Hidden coaching': "Selling, Fixing and Poaching"

#### 2.3 THE FORM TUTOR ROLE: Adviser and interested party

The negotiation of "provisional" choices

#### 2.4 THE PUPIL PERSPECTIVE: Pupils' choice criteria

Ability in, and enjoyment of a subject  
Occupational aspirations  
Teacher attractiveness  
Friendship  
Parents

CONCLUSION AND NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

## CHAPTER 2: PERSPECTIVES ON OPTION CHOICE

### The preparations for subject option choice in City Road

"You've got two hundred kids each one picking four options, it used to be five, so you've got eight hundred little slots to fill [in the timetable]. Now how the hell you're gonna do that on twenty-five periods, or in four blocks, and get every kid suited is - you know it's sometimes frightening it won't work. But it does. But you've always got some children who you can't completely satisfy (...) Usually it's for some sort of odd choice, you know. Often it's not the right sort of choice for the child."

Mr Jennings (The Member of Senior Management responsible for Subject Options and Timetabling)

In the vast majority of secondary schools in England and Wales some form of specialization occurs at the beginning of the fourth form as pupils begin the courses of study which will be examined at the end of their compulsory education. In most of these schools the specialization is decided through a system of 'options' which grant the pupils some element of choice in deciding upon the subjects they will follow in the fourth and fifth years (1). The 'results' of the choice process (in terms of the subjects which pupils subsequently follow) are of importance not only because they will determine the nature of a significant part of each pupil's timetable, but also because the decisions taken at 14-plus may have consequences for educational achievement in public examinations and the individual's opportunities in the post-school education and job markets.

In recognition of the importance of subject option choices, most schools offer a system of 'guided' choice, which entails some official role for staff as advisers, and results in the negotiation of choices between teachers, pupils and, in some cases, parents. "The options", as this process is sometimes referred to, can often take up most of the academic year for those involved, indeed in City Road some choices were not finally decided until the beginning of the following (fourth) year.

This chapter considers the position of four groups of actors who played an important role in the negotiation of the subject option decisions in City Road comprehensive. In

turn I will consider the senior staff, subject teachers, form tutors and pupils. In each case I wish to highlight the actors' perceptions of the demands which they faced, their aims and the solutions which they found within the limitations imposed by their position in the school. In so doing I will provide detail on the preparations for option choice made by each group of actors and thereby outline the context for the face-to-face negotiations which are considered in the following chapter.

## 2.1 SENIOR STAFF: The view from the top

Members of the City Road senior staff designed the school's options system and placed themselves in a position whereby they could vet all option choices. Senior staff defined both the 'legitimate' sources of information and the 'proper' criteria which could be applied to subject choice. The other participants in the options process worked within a system created by the senior staff, hence any account of that system must begin with an analysis of the role and perspectives of the senior staff.

### a) Senior staff and the options system

During my research the senior staff of City Road school comprised the Headteacher, three Deputies and a senior teacher. Each member was responsible for certain aspects of the administration of the school. Through his long standing role as author of the school timetable and his previous work in, what was then referred to as, "careers education" (now part of Guidance teaching in City Road) Mr Jennings (the senior teacher) had come to be charged with prime responsibility for subject option choice. Although the Head took an active interest in the system's organization and administration, in all matters concerned with the options Jennings was seen, by staff and pupils alike, as "the man in charge" (a subject teacher: field notes).

In this part of the chapter I wish to explore some of the problems which faced the senior staff, and Mr Jennings in particular, as they tried to reconcile the sometimes conflicting demands of their position, i.e. attempting to realize their own perception of what the options system should achieve (in relation to the pupils' 'best interests') whilst engineering a workable fourth year timetable, minimizing conflict with subject teachers and not compromising the notion of pupil choice.

I will use the senior staffs' explanation of the recent history of subject choice in City Road to highlight the complexities of their situation and reflect upon the solutions which they found. It should be emphasized that their account was retrospective, the system had already been reorganized when my field work began. Nevertheless, the seniors' views, especially Mr Jennings', are crucial to an understanding of the system which I observed. As I will show, Jennings' solution to his problems had the effect of placing the senior staff in a position of very great influence over subject choice in the school.

#### i. The decision to reorganize the options

In the academic year prior to my research the options system was drastically reorganized. It had been decided that the old "free choice" system was not working properly. The "free choice" organization was so named because it presented the pupils with a single list of subjects from which to choose their options, although in practice there had never been a completely free choice: various members of staff (form tutors, Guidance and subject teachers) had offered pupils their 'advice' and each pupil was required to choose at least one science and humanity subject. The latter prescriptions were imposed by Jennings in an attempt to ensure a 'balanced' combination of subjects. Mr Jennings, the Head and the Guidance staff each argued that, in relation to post-school work, the options should try to "leave as many doors open as possible" (Headteacher: field notes).

In the "free choice" system, once the pupils had made their decisions the fourth year timetable was created in order to facilitate as many of their choices as

possible.

Creating a fourth year timetable which would satisfy departmental requirements for teaching resources (in terms of time slots and room allocations) whilst allowing the maximum number of pupils' subject choices was Mr Jennings' responsibility. This was a task which, he said, became increasingly difficult to perform satisfactorily. There had been a problem over setting by ability, with some 'able' pupils being timetabled in lessons that would have to be taught as mixed ability groups because of the small number of pupils in certain combinations of subjects. Such problems worried all concerned, especially subject departments who wanted to set by ability but could not and the senior staff who, in an atmosphere of reductions in the LEA's secondary school budget, felt that the school's examination results were "not good enough" (Headteacher: field notes). Therefore the problems of timetabling and pupil achievement were important in convincing the seniors of the need to restructure the options system.

As the members of senior staff explained to me the reasoning behind the organizational changes, a further consideration emerged which involved the role of subject teachers. I want to emphasize that I was not present when the changes were made, however, through my conversations with those most involved, it seemed that there had been a feeling that the "free choice" system had been at the mercy of individual subject departments and staff. In particular, the senior staff had been concerned by the number and type of alterations which were made after the pupils' original option preferences had been recorded.

Mr Jennings      "I can remember one particular department where fifteen kids were moved out and fifteen kids were moved in. Now this was a subject where you didn't need to be an academic genius to do it, more of an interest and a certain amount of skill. But these fifteen kids were lower achievers and probably more trouble, and the kids that went in were higher achievers and less trouble (...) So there are those sort of things you look at, you know, they became quite evident..."

Although the senior staff sympathized with the dilemma of the subject teachers

who were sometimes thought to use the options as an opportunity to control the 'quality' of their teaching groups in the upper school, a major point of conflict was the interpretation of what constituted a pupil's 'best interests'.

A senior member  
of staff

"[Teachers] have got jealousies about their own areas - Quite right, if they're keen enough to want to teach the subject they want the best children they can get. But sometimes I don't think it's always in the kid's best interests to do that particular area. (...)

The child picks his own subjects - with advice - but it's how the advice is given. I mean if there's undue pressure put on some children ... you know, they'll have a soft spot for a teacher, it's unfair if a teacher uses that, that's not in the child's interests."

In their concern that each child's 'best interests' should be served, the senior staff saw it as their duty to protect the pupils from subject teachers who might be influenced by their own sectional interests. Hence, the difference between proper 'advice' and improper 'manoeuvring' or 'pressure' was defined in relation to the source of the opinion. For example, Mr Jennings felt that he was capable of making more balanced decisions than a subject teacher aware of his/her falling pupil numbers and vulnerability to cut-backs. Put simply, the senior staff considered theirs to be the only genuinely independent perception of a child's interests.

Mr Jennings

"I've been accused of manoeuvring kids away from certain subjects - which was totally unjustified, we were advising children on certain things. (...)

I know there are certain members of staff who will manoeuvre kids if you're not careful. Which you condemn really. I've been at a parents evening (...) where one very bright young man was persuaded by his form teacher, who taught a certain subject, to do that subject, which I didn't feel was being fair to that lad who could achieve in other areas. And SHOULD have achieved in other areas."

The senior staff therefore saw their decision to reorganize the options as being taken "in the kids' best interests", ie. as a

response to unsatisfactory examination results, timetabling difficulties and what they perceived as the sometimes biased interference of subject teachers. In view of these problems and the decision to reorganize, the next section considers the changes which Jennings and the Headteacher introduced.

## ii. The "new" options organization

The pupils of my research age grade began their options preparations within the "new" organization which had been introduced the previous year. Like its predecessor this system began with the third year examinations. In the old "free choice" system subject departments had justified their views about particular pupils by reference to their likely examination performance in two years time. The senior staff believed that such an arrangement allowed "too many let-outs" (Mr Jennings), ie. staff could underestimate a child's ability, either unconsciously or in a deliberate attempt to legitimate their challenge of an unwelcome choice. This led Jennings and the Head to require more detailed information from subject departments. Hence, every department (including Mathematics and English which were compulsory for all pupils in the upper school) was asked to fill in an assessment sheet on each pupil in the year.

The option assessment sheets gave a space for the subject teacher to comment on the pupil as they felt appropriate, but also required an "effort" grade (from A to E, with C being understood as 'average') and a "rank order". The rank order required the department to identify each pupil's ability in a subject relative to the rest of the age grade. Mr Jennings stated that the rank order should reflect the pupil's achievements both during the year and in the third year examination. Despite this official requirement, my own interviews with members of the different subject departments revealed that in practice most used examination results almost exclusively as the basis for their rank orders (2).

The option assessment sheets were the seniors' attempt to identify each child's

ability and examination potential in a subject, and proved to be critical in deciding access to certain subjects and teaching groups. Although the assessments themselves offered no information as to what subject departments had based the rank orders on, the seniors interpreted them as a means of comparing ability in different subjects.

The senior staff used the assessments as the basis for their decisions concerning pupils' suitability to opt for various subjects, often assuming that the highest rank order indicated each pupil's 'best subject'. Such assumptions failed to take into account the overall standard of the population in each subject, against which the pupil was being measured, yet the assessment sheets were central to the "new" options system.

Mr Jennings      "When I get [the assessments] I put down on this big sheet of paper all the rankings (...) where each child has come. And then what I'll do is go through - I'll go through the Deputies, four or five of us have a look at it, and then put down what we think a child will perform best at in examinations. There are three compulsories [English, Mathematics and Guidance] and four subjects they ought to be choosing (...) then when I've got those back, I try and fit kids into an option pattern." (My emphasis)

Four members of senior staff (the Headteacher, two Deputies and Mr Jennings) used the assessments as their guide to each pupil's abilities. The seniors' 'recommended' the four subjects which each pupil 'ought' to take (ie. that they were most able in). Mr Jennings then created a fourth year timetable which would allow the realization of as many recommendations as possible. That timetable would act as the basis for what he called an "option pattern", ie. an arrangement of subjects in four choice blocks (each block relating to particular timetable slots). By requiring the pupils to choose one subject from each block, the basis for a workable timetable was ensured.

Once the option pattern was finalized the pupils and their parents were invited to an "Option Evening" where they were presented with the seniors' recommendations in a meeting with the child's form tutor and a member of senior staff. The meeting



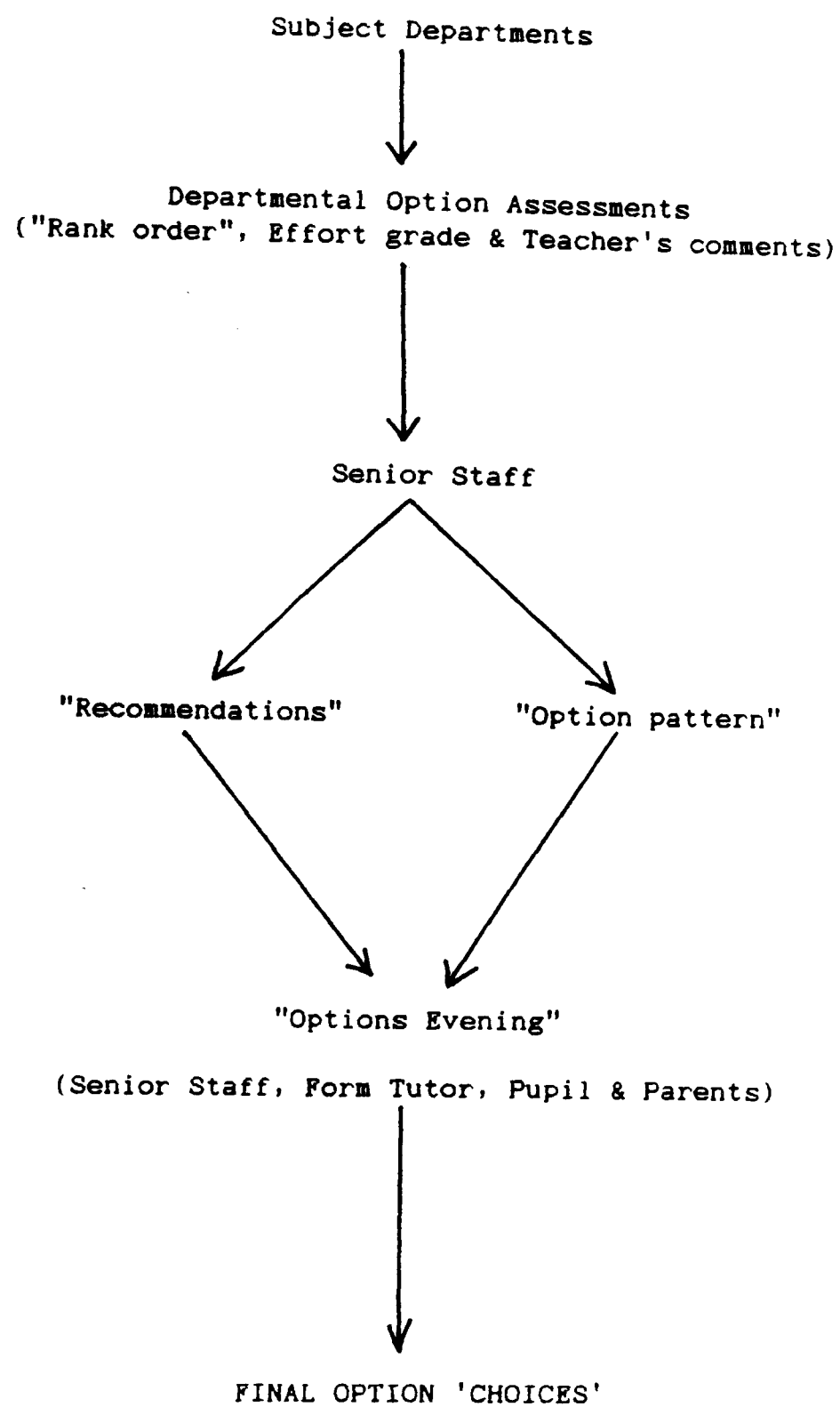


FIGURE 2.1: The "New" Option Organization

would discuss the most appropriate choices until some decision had been reached. These were then taken to either Jennings or the Headteacher, who made certain that they were possible within the restrictions of the option pattern.

The "new" organization was introduced in the year prior to my research and Mr Jennings thought that at least 90% of parents had attended the options meetings. He attributed this exceptionally high turn-out to a letter which "threatened" (his words) that the pupil's timetable could not be finalized without parental involvement. The few parents who did not attend were subsequently contacted by telephone or letter.

Mr Jennings and the Head saw the "new" system as a great success and held up the mere "handful" of changes which were later made as evidence that they had "got it right" (field notes). Figure 2.1 summarizes the structure of the "new" options system.

The decision to create the option pattern in relation to senior staff recommendations before the pupils expressed their preferences was a response to the 'technical' problem of timetabling the options of two hundred pupils, yet it represented a very great change in the whole basis of the options system in the school. The option pattern no longer responded to the actual desires of the pupils, but rather was created around the senior staffs' recommendations for each pupil. Therefore, in an attempt to improve the system, the reorganization placed senior staff perceptions of the child's 'interests' at the heart of the process.

The "new" organization meant that all negotiations had to take place within the confines of a system which embodied the senior staffs' assumptions about the nature of the school's intake and what constituted a 'balanced' combination of subjects. The prescriptions concerning the need to study at least one science and one humanity subject remained from the previous system, while beliefs concerning the nature of the pupil population were fed into the design of the options pattern itself (figure 2.2). For example, the widespread belief that, because of the nature of the

COMPULSORY CORE:        MATHS    ENGLISH    P.E.    GUIDANCE

AND

DESIGN OPTION (3 from 8 craft elements)

THE OPTIONS:            Choose 1 subject from each block

<u>Block 1</u>	<u>Block 2</u>	<u>Block 3</u>	<u>Block 4</u>
Physics	Geography	History	German
Art	History 'O' level	Chemistry	Computer Studies
Drama	R.E.	R.E.	Chemistry (2)
Biology	French	Tech. Graphics	Art
Child Care	Biology	Computer St.	Child Care
Applied	Applied	Community	
Science(1)	Science(1)	Studies(1)	Technical Graphics
Typing	Community	Community	
	St. x2 (1)	St. x2 (1)	Woodwork
	Typing		Metalwork
			Housecraft / Food
			Dress / Textiles

FIGURE 2.2 : The "Option Pattern"

Notes:

- 1) To allow the "least-able" pupils to meet the requirement of at least one science and one humanity option, the school offered a variety of CSE mode III courses. "Applied science" was a limited grade science option in which no pupil could achieve higher than a CSE grade 3. Community Studies was seen as the humanity option for the less able pupils and the 'Double' Community Studies option (X 2), which was aimed at very low achieving pupils, took up two option slots. Therefore pupils could only choose the single Community studies course in option block 3.
- 2) During the decision making phase of the options process, a Chemistry option was moved from block 2 to block 4.

school's catchment area, the pupil intake was generally of below average ability led to the creation of what Jennings referred to as a "split option" in block 4.

Mr Jennings saw Block 4 of the option pattern as catering for the diversity of abilities within the pupil population by offering a choice between an 'academic' subject (for the 'able') or a 'practical' subject (for the 'less able'). The senior staff tended to view as being 'academic' those subjects which emphasized written skills (eg. Physics, Chemistry, History, Geography, Modern Languages), while craft based, more 'practical' disciplines were generally accorded lower status and seen as particularly suited to the 'less able' pupils (eg. Technical Graphics, Woodwork and Metalwork). Such a distinction was recognized, although not always accepted as legitimate, by almost all City Road staff (of all levels) with whom I spoke. This kind of status distinction between the 'academic' and 'non-academic' is nothing new, it has been found in several previous studies (eg. Woods, 1979 and Ball, 1981) and is rooted in the history of educational provision in this country (Hurman 1978: 32-4).

The fourth block of the option pattern was specifically designed to provide an opportunity for the 'less able' to double the amount of practical work in their timetable, by opting for a two year craft subject in addition to the compulsory design course. In designing the option pattern Mr Jennings drew upon his knowledge of subject take-up rates in the past, yet the construction of block 4 seemed to leave many pupils little alternative but to follow a practical subject, since the majority of courses in block 4 were craft based. Computer Studies (whose status was somewhat ambiguous) enjoyed great popularity among the pupils but the number who could opt for it was severely limited by a shortage of machines. This left German as the only 'academic' subject in Block 4 which was open to most pupils. As my research age grade moved through the choice process several members of the year staff informally complained about this to Mr Jennings who, in response, re-timetabled a Chemistry option to increase the number of academic subjects in that block. Even so, in block 4 only 61 of the 200 pupils on the third year roll, at the

end of the academic year, opted for subjects which were not portrayed by the options guidance staff (seniors and form tutors) as being essentially "practical" and non-academic, ie. German, Chemistry and Computer Studies (further detail on the assessment and presentation of different academic statuses is included in Chapter 4).

### iii. Industrial action: the 'contingency' options organization

Preparations for the option decisions of my research age grade were proceeding in line with the "new" system (then in its second year) when in April the major teaching unions began a campaign of industrial action. This involved a withdrawal of 'goodwill' by many staff in the school and meant that the official option meetings with parents, which teachers were to have attended after school hours and at their own expense, had to be cancelled.

In response to these problems Mr Jennings and the Headteacher introduced a 'contingency' options organization (summarized in Figure 2.3). Mr Jennings had already begun to collect the departmental option assessments when the industrial action hit and the seniors were able to draw up their 'recommendations' as planned. In anticipation of the difficulties which seemed likely in getting parents into the school during working hours, it was decided to offer pupils the opportunity to make 'provisional' choices from the 'option pattern'. These were collected by Mr Jennings and allowed the senior staff to compare the pupils' 'provisional' choices with their own 'recommendations'.

If the pupil's 'provisional' choices contradicted the senior staff 'recommendations' or did not fulfil the requirements of the system (such as choosing at least one science and humanities subject) the pupil would be 'seen' to discuss the choices.

All the third year pupils were encouraged to arrange a meeting between their parents and form tutor to discuss their choices. A member of senior staff was also to be present and any 'problems' with the 'provisional' choices could be discussed

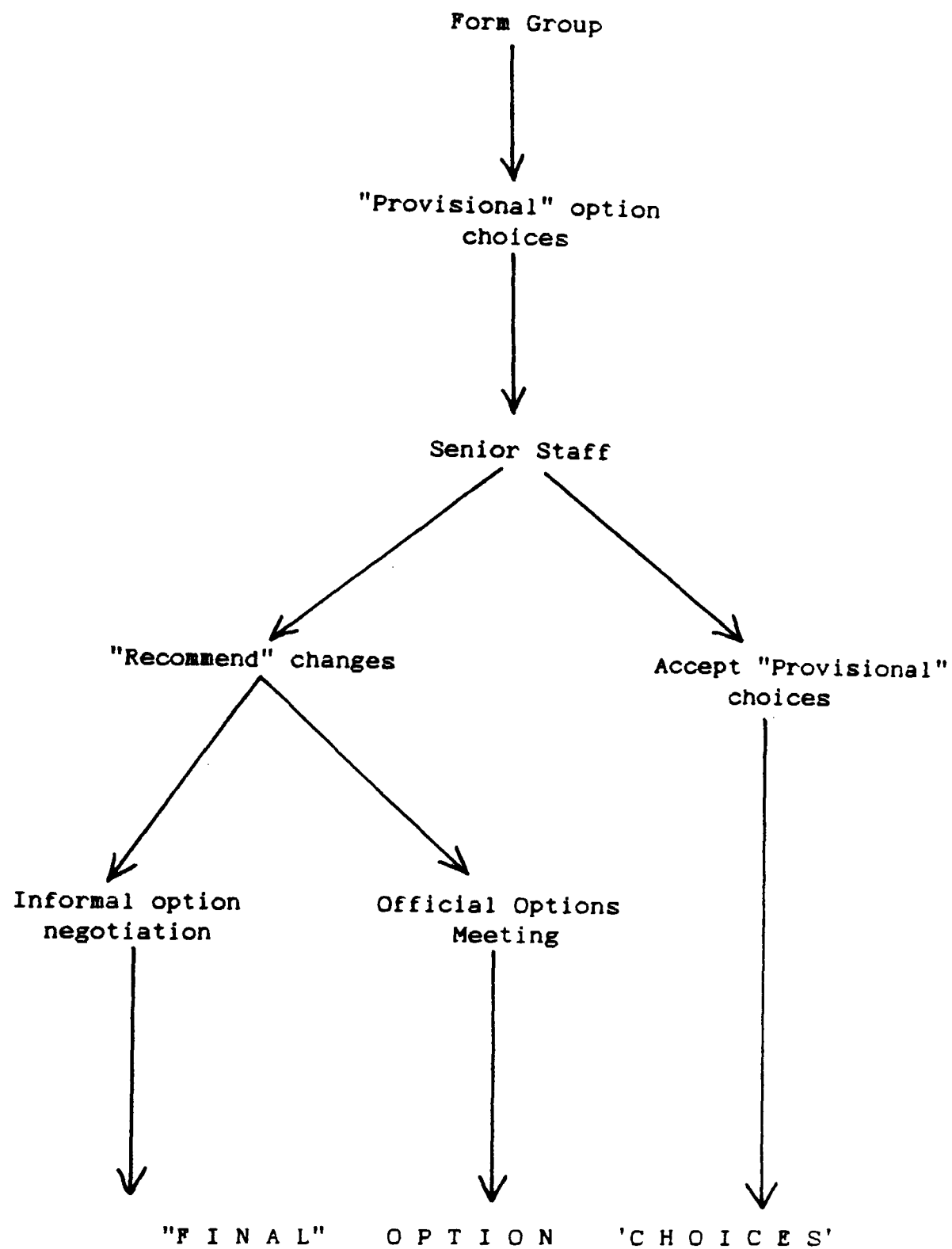


FIGURE 2.3: The 'Contingency' Option Organization

(ie. what were now to be the official options meetings). The industrial action meant that teachers would only see parents who could get into the school during the day. This made such visits particularly difficult for some parents with jobs or young children, and the majority of third year parents did not arrange interviews. I have no reliable figures for the entire age grade but Mr Jennings estimated the turn out at "less than 50 percent, about 35 percent" (field notes). If a pupil did not have an official meeting the 'provisional' choices would stand unless any options conflicted with the seniors' recommendations, in which case an informal negotiation took place between the pupil and their form tutor, who was advised of the clash by Mr Jennings. These meetings are considered further in the following chapter.

#### iv. Senior staff centrality and the ideal of pupil choice

In the next chapter I will examine the participant roles and strategies which emerged during the face-to-face negotiation of option choices, but at this point I wish to emphasize two facts about the 'contingency' option system which my research age grade experienced. Firstly, it should be noted that despite the changes which were made in response to the industrial action, the 'contingency' system was designed within the context of the "new" organization and retained the latter's principal features, placing the senior staff in a position of great influence over option choices. It was still they who determined the rules within which the other participants (subject teachers, form tutors, pupils and parents) were able to negotiate over option decisions. The 'option pattern' was designed to facilitate the recommendations of senior staff and reflected their assumptions about 'academic balance' and the nature of the pupil population.

The second point which I want to stress is that despite their central position in the re-structured City Road option system, the senior staff continued to talk about pupil choice. In fact, the seniors experienced something of a dilemma over the role of choice in the options system.

Earlier in this chapter I stated that "the senior staff considered theirs to

be the only genuinely independent perception of a child's interests". This belief in the inherent superiority of their own judgements applied not only in relation to subject teachers (who, as I have shown, were thought to be susceptible to their own sectional interests), but also to the pupils and their parents. The staff of City Road (of all levels) tended to see parents as lacking the necessary understanding to make the 'correct' educational decisions on their own. Similarly, the senior staff felt that the pupils themselves might not be able to perceive their true interests; firstly because of the complex and changing requirements of the job and educational markets, and secondly because they suspected a likely concern with more immediate problems such as maintaining friendship groups. Yet despite the senior staffs' conviction that they knew best, they were genuinely committed to the idea that the pupil and his/her parents should be actively involved in option choices.

The dilemma which this caused for the seniors was well illustrated in one interview when Mr Jennings was summing up the nature of the "new" options organization and, in noting the role of senior staff 'recommendations', stated that "It's not the kid's choice any more". He immediately qualified this by noting that "it STILL IS a free choice really, if the kid INSISTS on doing something he WILL get it" (field notes).

Despite their belief in their ability to perceive the pupils' 'best interests' the seniors were unwilling to deny pupils an element of choice. They wanted to 'persuade' the pupils to follow their advice, not to 'force' them. This concern was common to all the members of staff who were most involved in the option negotiations (seniors and form tutors). There was a sense in which they felt that it was 'wrong' to dictate to the pupils, whom they genuinely wanted to involve. A further, more concrete, argument against the dictation of subject options concerned future pupil motivation.

As a later chapter discusses in more detail, keeping the pupils motivated during their final years in the school emerged as one of the most important concerns for City Road's teachers. Therefore, the possibility of influencing pupil



motivation through the options system could not be ignored. It was felt that if the pupil had chosen a subject they would be less likely to lose interest in it later in their school careers. In addition, both the senior staff and the form tutors recognised the opportunity to use the choice element as a counter to any complaints which pupils might have against their optional subjects.

A form tutor [speaking after the options process]

"It's something which I always use. I've used on the kids since the options, and several parents when I talked to them during the option evening, that [in the upper school] they're doing the subjects that they've chosen to do. There's no excuse for them not getting on with their work."

The staff's belief in the need to involve the pupils and their parents helps to explain why the seniors went to such lengths to adapt the system to the limitations imposed by industrial action. Both Jennings and the Head clearly wanted to remain central to the options system, but just as clear was their concern to maintain some element of pupil choice. As my analysis of the face-to-face negotiations will show, the seniors' uncertainty, concerning the paradox of 'pupil interests' versus pupil choice, weakened the seniors' negotiating power to some extent. Given such a dilemma, the seniors' attempted to limit the potential conflict between their recommendations and the pupils' provisional choices by advising the age grade as to the 'proper' choice criteria. It is to this 'coaching' which I now turn.

#### b) Senior staff and the "coaching" of pupil choice

In the months leading up to the option decisions, staff of all levels (senior, form and subject) attempted to prepare the pupils for the choices which lay ahead: this was referred to as "coaching".

The word "coaching" arose several times in interviews with members of staff and was used in two very different senses. Firstly, it was felt that the pupils needed to be 'coached' as to the 'proper' criteria upon which their choices should be based. Alternatively, the word was also used to describe private or 'hidden' preparation by some subject teachers, who were thought to 'pressure' certain pupils

into opting for their subject. I will consider the 'hidden coaching' later in this chapter, but for the moment I wish to concentrate upon the 'open coaching' by members of senior staff.

The 'official coaching' of pupils took place in a number of contexts and was always open and direct. For example, in meetings, such as assemblies and specially arranged talks, and in publications such as the Options Booklet which allowed each department space to explain their fourth and fifth year courses. Such coaching was explicit and open to the scrutiny of staff from subject departments since it often occurred through media which addressed the entire age grade: hence, this was 'open coaching'. This form of coaching was practiced by the seniors (especially Jennings and the Headteacher) and by the Head of Guidance, who worked closely with Jennings on many aspects of the department's work.

As noted above, despite the senior staff's power to challenge choices with which they did not agree, for a mixture of ideological (freedom of choice/participation) and practical (motivation/control) reasons they were keen to minimize any conflicts between their recommendations and the pupils' 'provisional' choices. In an attempt to pre-empt any such conflicts the school set out to persuade the pupils and parents to approach option choices in a way which complemented the 'official' senior staff criteria. This 'open coaching' had two main elements; firstly, establishing that the options should be "taken seriously" (field notes), ie. emphasizing how important the decisions were in relation to future educational and life chances. Secondly, the seniors sought to clearly identify the actors whom the pupils should consult and to define the 'legitimate' criteria which they should apply when making their choices.

Throughout the pre-option build up the seniors and the Head of Guidance emphasized that the school had the pupils' interests at heart. As I have already noted, although this was their goal, it should also be noted that by presenting the system in this way the seniors acted to legitimize an organization which gave them

great power to challenge any pupil choices with which they did not agree.

The 'open coaching' took place in a number of settings, one of which was the morning assembly which all pupils in the age grade attended at least once a week. As the decision-making phase of the process grew near the morning assemblies were increasingly used to address matters related to the options. Also each form group visited the school's Careers Room and were spoken to by the Head of Guidance. Similarly the pupils' parents were coached at an "Options Explanation Evening" which was held prior to the industrial action. The following pieces of 'open coaching' illustrate the points which were made.

The Head of Guidance to a third year form:

"Now what sort of effect can [option] choice have on you? Well, it can affect the sort of exams you take, the job you get, the rest of your life when you leave school."

Mr Jennings to the parents' Option Explanation Evening:

"At the centre of it all is the child. They're at the centre. The subjects are recommended because we feel they've done better in that [subject] in the past, and also the option [blocks] are formed to allow each child to take subjects which we think they're capable at."

Having emphasized how important options choices were and that the system was designed in the pupils interests, the school then set about establishing the 'legitimate' influences upon subject choice, ie. those criteria and sources of information which would complement the senior staff 'recommendations'.

The pupils were frequently advised to ask their parents for advice and especially to consult the Guidance teacher or school careers library to find out about the subjects they would require for any occupations they might be considering. In addition to the demands of the job market, the senior staff went to great pains to emphasize the importance of ability in, and enjoyment of, different subjects. The school's aim of providing a 'balanced education', which would 'keep doors open', was used to justify the rules which in part also restricted certain choices.

Mr Jennings to a third year assembly:

"Now what I want you to do is to take this sheet of paper [the option pattern] home, show it to your parents, TALK about it with your parents (...) You sit down with your Mum and Dad and say 'What do you feel about this?' If you haven't already, and you think you'd like to do this in the future, use the Careers room and have a look in there. Do you need that particular subject? Is that going to be useful?"

The Head of Guidance to a third year form:

"... the first deciding factor is whether you're good at the subject and whether you LIKE IT. That's one important reason. It's no good doing it if you can't stand the sight of everything that goes off in that subject and you're no good at it anyway."

Mr Jennings to the parents' Option Explanation Evening:

"What we DO try and get, for every pupil, is what we call a BALANCE. A BALANCED EDUCATION. So there are some subjects they HAVE to do."

As regards 'illegitimate' influences on subject choice, the pupils were repeatedly told not to consult their friends or consider their personal feelings about certain members of staff.

Mr Jennings to a third year assembly:

"We don't want anybody sitting turning to a friend and saying 'Look that column there, we'll do that'. Whatever you pick should be for you and nobody else (...)

For Heaven's sake DON'T, DON'T think what your friend is going in, and if you've had a sort of 'fall-out' with a teacher lately don't discard the subject, because that teacher might not take you next year (...) You think about the SUBJECTS not about who's taking it..."

In fact my interviews with pupils at the end of their fourth year showed that to some extent these 'illegitimate' concerns could have real consequences for achievement in lessons, eg. where pupils disliked the teacher or were socially isolated in a subject, they might lose interest in that lesson or attempt to change the choice part way through the course. However, during the options process such concerns were seen as irrational and immature by the senior staff.

This section has described the perspectives of, and demands upon, the senior staff of City Road school as they related to the organization and administration of subject option choice in the school. The seniors were central to the system which they created: they vetted all pupil choices and defined the legitimate choice criteria. It was within this context that the other groups of participants in the options (the subject teachers, form tutors and pupils) prepared for the decision-making phase of the system. The following sections consider the position of each of these groups and describe how they adapted to the constraints which the system imposed upon them.

## 2.2 SUBJECT TEACHERS AND THE OPTION SYSTEM

The options choices were of very great importance for all departments whose subject(s) was not compulsory in the fourth and fifth year. The abilities and motivation of pupils who opted would determine the classroom 'atmosphere' and indeed job satisfaction that would be possible for staff with teaching groups in the upper school for the next two years. The pattern of take-up by pupils determined not only the size of teaching groups (which could rule out setting by ability) but also directly affected the allocation of resources and funding between departments. In a few cases, because of local authority spending cuts and the falling pupil rolls, the very existence of courses was threatened. Like many comprehensives in the area, City Road knew that it was to 'lose' several teaching posts in the near future. Therefore it is no exaggeration to say that, while for many members of staff the options choices were of real importance, for a few they were absolutely critical.

In addition to informal day-to-day contacts with members of the school staff I interviewed senior teachers or the Head of Department in several subject areas; Mathematics, English, Modern Languages, Physics, Biology, Geography, History,

Religious Education, Community Studies, Technical Graphics and Craft, Design and Technology. Every subject teacher with whom I spoke was critical of at least one aspect of the options system. In almost all cases their complaints centred around the minimal role which they were granted in the choice process.

Given the dominant position which senior staff had assumed in the "new" option organization, many subject teachers felt excluded from option choice and in interviews with me they complained that their subject was being treated badly, as the following comment by a humanities teacher illustrates:

"Unless you're a form tutor in the third year, they don't tell you anything. (...) I don't even know where [my subject] is on the [option pattern]." (field notes)

Apart from a brief entry in the Options booklet, the only formal role for subject departments in the "new" organization was the preparation of the option assessments, upon which the senior staff based their 'recommendations'. Mr Jennings told me that when the "new" organization was introduced, because of the more limited and formalized role which it gave to subject teachers, he had anticipated strong opposition. However:

"...nobody queried it, much to my surprise. 'Cause I thought there'd be 'ruptions."

As I have already stated, I was not present in the school when these changes were made and so I could not observe how staff reacted to them, however, my interviews with subject teachers did confirm Jennings' reports that there had not been the opposition he expected. All subject teachers disliked at least one element of the options system yet very few had made any kind of complaint to the senior staff. Indeed I watched as a teacher, who had complained angrily to me that his subject was being forced to compromise its aim of setting in the upper school, sat silently as Mr Jennings told a small group of teachers that both staff and pupils seemed to have liked the timetable arrangement which resulted from the "new"

organization.

The only subject teachers who approached members of senior staff with their complaints were those who felt 'most at risk', ie. the teachers in departments who had experienced falling take-up rates over the recent past and recognized, in the option pattern and subsequent timetable arrangements, that their subject was being denied any opportunity to group pupils by 'ability' in the upper school. For example, the Head of Religious Education complained that able pupils were often discouraged by seniors from taking her subject. She also emphasized that by splitting her timetable allocation between two blocks it was impossible to introduce any form of setting. Only a handful of teachers felt themselves to be in such a threatened position, and because the reorganization had affected almost all departments, open challenges to the system were very rare. However, there were circumstances under which subject teachers could try to influence pupils' choices without explicitly challenging the senior staff.

#### Hidden coaching: "Selling", "Fixing" and "Poaching"

Three form tutors invited guest representatives of different departments to speak to their tutees about the options which were available in the fourth year. As one subject teacher observed, these talks offered them an opportunity to "sell" their subject, an invitation which according to Mr Cliff (Form 3D's tutor) every department took up. I was only able to observe three such talks, by teachers of two sciences and a humanities subject. None of the speakers were among those 'most at risk', ie. in relation to some departments in the school their position was reasonably secure.

Although I only watched three departmental presentations to form 3D, and therefore can only make the most tentative analysis of their use by staff, it was clear that they shared certain common features; each gave a summary of their examination syllabuses and emphasized either how useful the subject was in its own right, or how well it complemented other choices. Although the talks were given to

a whole form and the form tutor was often present, there was a sense in which these talks seemed more personal than usual teacher-pupil talk in class. For example, two of the three speakers illustrated their talks with personal stories about themselves or their children and one took the opportunity to counter senior staff advice about the worth of their subject. In a somewhat conspiratorial tone the teacher advised:

"Now don't go TOO much on what the careers teachers say. (...) Mr. Jennings in the past has said to the boys, 'Well I shouldn't bother to do [this subject]. It's not much use to you.' Well actually it is. The boys who do [this subject] do very well."

It is also important to note that if these talks offered an opportunity to 'sell' the subject, they could also work as a counter to certain choices by making the subject very unattractive to some pupils. For example, the following is an extract from my notes on a talk given by a male teacher of one of the physical sciences.

Mr. Cliff [3D form tutor] was not in the school this morning, so Mr Martin [the year head] took the register and told the class that Mr Flint was coming in to tell them about his subject.

Mr Flint came in. He and Martin exchanged some brief words. I heard Martin say, ..."basically tell them what the course is in the 4th and 5th year."

As Mr Martin left the room, Flint shouted across at a group of girls, at the back of the class, to stop talking. He had already succeeded in quietening them with "I haven't got all day to wait for you lot." However he went on very aggressively,

"ONE THING I HATE AND DETEST IS IGNORANT FEMALES ... AND THIS SCHOOL IS LOUSY WITH THEM THESE DAYS. 'Suppose I better address myself to you lads. Don't want to see that ugly lot in my lab."  
(tape transcript)

By opening his talk in this way the teacher not only excluded the girls from the rest of the lesson, but also from his subject. His final sentence combined explicit rejection with an insult about their 'femininity'. The girls were accused not only of being ignorant, but also of being ugly. It was no surprise when only one of the ten girls in 3D at this time eventually chose Mr Flint's main specialism:



in her case a particular occupational ambition was felt to require the subject and, as a later section of this chapter will explain, occupational aspirations were among the most powerful criteria which pupils applied to their choices.

The departmental presentations which were given to three of the third year forms are examples of 'hidden coaching': they were not part of the "new" organization, depended upon invitations from individual form tutors and never took place in the presence of senior staff. The existence of other strategies of this kind was much more difficult to establish since, by definition, they were 'hidden' from the usual routine of the options build-up. Hence, I had no way of knowing when and where such coaching might take place. It was not only that personal approaches to pupils were defined as 'illegitimate' by the senior staff, the subject teachers themselves felt them to be 'unfair', if not to the pupils (whom they sometimes argued became better informed of their prospects) then to other subject departments. This meant that teachers were often quick to accuse their colleagues in other departments, but rarely told me of any approaches which they themselves had made.

I learnt of other 'hidden coaching' strategies from two sources. Firstly, in interviews with teachers and Heads of department where several accusations were made that certain staff were engaged in "manoeuvring behind the scenes" (field notes). The names of the strategies which I use here are the ones which teachers sometimes used in describing the tactics of others. The use of some of these strategies was confirmed in observations and interviews with staff. However, most of my material on such 'hidden coaching' was generated by a second source, namely the pupils, in interviews which focused on their options preparations. It was the pupils' evidence which convinced me that 'hidden coaching' was a fact of the options preparations rather than a myth generated within the ranks of particular subject departments.

"Fixing" was a term used by teachers in a humanities subject: it referred to practices which they felt prejudiced the supposedly 'objective' nature of the third year examinations which many staff and pupils used as a guide to a pupil's ability

in a subject. The teachers making the accusations felt that their department set a "hard exam" which was a "genuine test", ie. they did not devote any lesson time to revision. They compared this with another department which spent several lessons preparing the pupils for the third year examinations and made them "easy" by "tipping off" pupils about certain areas which were likely to be tested. There was even a 'story', which all members of the department told, about a teacher who advised pupils taking a multiple choice paper "If you don't know the answer put 'A'." One teacher commented, "You get suspicious when kid's who can't read the questions get 60% in multiple choice" (field notes). These teachers felt that no account was ever taken of the differences between departmental examinations, "If they get 80% in that subject and 50% in ours, which do YOU think they'll take?" (field notes).

I have no way of knowing whether the 'advice' on multiple choice questions which the department quoted was ever actually given, but I did confirm that the contents of third year examinations in a number of subjects did not come as a complete surprise to the pupils. Members of my case study forms reported that several departments set one lesson aside each week for revision before the examinations, and I was present when one teacher explicitly told a group that two sections of the third year course were "bound to come up".

"Poaching" (also sometimes referred to as "priming") was a strategy which involved more than simply using lesson time to advise a teaching group of the usefulness of a subject, most departments seem to have 'sold' themselves in that way at some point. "Poaching" referred to individual approaches to pupils, either during a lesson or 'privately', for example in a corridor after a lesson. "Poaching" was limited almost exclusively to the most able pupils and teachers often appeared to use the high status GCE level of examination as 'bait', even where the result of the third year examination suggested the less prestigious CSE to be more appropriate.

DG

"Have any of your teachers had a word with you individually at any time to say, 'I think you ought to be doing this subject next year?'"

- Ashley Roberts "Yeah, but not to us. To Arif".
- DG "Why is that?"
- Ashley "He's got- You see in Geography he's got alot of knowledge in it and Mr (...) goes to him 'You should be doing 'O' level.'"
- 
- Arif Aslam "...he came up and he said, 'I'll put you in the 'O'level group - I'll recommend you for the 'O'level group.'"
- 
- Duncan Newham "Mr (...) said I should take History 'cause I got 83, fourth best mark in the third year."
- 
- Janet Nelson "Mrs (...) wants me to do Biology. She says I got a poorish mark in the exam, but I'll still be in the 'O' level group anyway, if I decide to take it."

Therefore, although the options process was of great importance to all subjects which were not compulsory in the upper school, faced with a system which allowed only a limited role for subject departments relatively few teachers actually complained to senior staff. Rather, they could attempt to protect their interests, in competition with other departments, by coaching the pupils in ways which exploited their regular 'access' to pupils during the school week and re-defined their official role in the options system, ie. in their own lessons and in speeches to form groups in their capacity as subject specialists.

### 2.3 THE FORM TUTOR ROLE: Adviser and interested party

The form tutor was officially responsible for monitoring the general progress of a group of pupils as they moved through their school careers, hence, they were seen as the member of staff who knew each pupil best. Because of their close links, the seniors anticipated that the tutors could help to 'advise' their pupils over option choice. However, the form tutors were not independent advisers; they were

members of subject departments and were junior in rank to the seniors who administered the options system. Part of the following chapter examines the problems which this raised for the tutors during the official option meetings which brought together their pupils, parents and senior staff. In this section I wish to briefly consider the ways in which the tutors of two of my case study forms interpreted their role during the early stages of the option process.

#### The negotiation of "provisional" choices

Once the 'contingency' options organization had been decided, Mr Jennings gave each pupil a copy of the option pattern within which they were required to make, what were officially referred to as, their "provisional" choices. At the same time Mr Jennings distributed each pupil's option assessments to their form tutors, whom he clearly felt should be involved in these decisions. However, Jennings had no meetings with the form tutors during this part of the process and their role was left mostly undefined. The only certain requirement, passed on to the tutors by the Year Head, was that they should forward the completed option patterns (ie. marked with each pupil's 'provisional' choices) to Mr Jennings. Therefore the tutors had a great deal of discretion as to their role in the 'provisional' option decisions.

Within the age grade the amount of form tutor involvement varied greatly; ranging from complete participation through face-to-face negotiations within the form, to doing no more than collect the completed sheets from the pupils. It is likely that no two form tutors did exactly the same, certainly each of my three case study tutors did things slightly differently: in this section I will concentrate upon the two who did least and most, as regards their involvement in the 'provisional' decisions of their tutees. The approaches of these tutors reflect the diversity of form tutor involvement which existed across the age grade and reveal something about the position of subject teachers who, because of their pastoral responsibilities in City Road, become 'option advisers' once every five years.

Mr Dean (tutor of 3C) did nothing more than collect his pupils' 'provisional' choices. Mr Dean's specialist subject was compulsory for all pupils in the upper school and he explained his treatment of 'provisional' choices by reference to his lack of knowledge about other departments' courses in the fourth and fifth years,

"It's difficult for me to comment on the difference between doing Craft, or Design, or Art, or Chemistry, or Biology without having an in-depth knowledge of what actually goes on at CSE level today (...) I have no real concept of what goes on in other departments or what is entailed by their various syllabuses."

Mr Dean did not feel competent to advise his tutees over their decisions and so he simply collected their choices and passed them on to those who did claim such competence, the senior staff.

Like Mr Dean, Mr Cliff (tutor of 3D) cared deeply about his pupils' education. However, unlike Mr Dean, Mr Cliff chose to offer advice concerning the 'provisional' choices. Mr Cliff did this despite recognizing that as a teacher of an optional subject he might find himself in a difficult position:

Mr Cliff  
(3D tutor) "It never fails to amaze me how easily I can influence which way they go. And in that sense I think it's a little unfair. You've got to try and be sort of... " [his voice trails off as if inviting me to finish his sentence]

DG [After a few seconds pause] "Yeah?"

Mr Cliff "'Cause I'm biased more towards practical than academic (...) and especially with [my specialism], if I'm not careful, if I don't have enough numbers then the subject falls out. [ie. will not be run] So if I feel there aren't enough I can easily.... er, ..... Not that I would of course."

That Mr Cliff recognized and spoke about the possibilities for misusing his 'adviser' role towards his own (departmental) ends illustrated his very real concern to put the pupils' interests first. However, when Mr Jennings received the 'provisional' choices he felt that some tutors clearly had used their position to bolster their own subjects' take-up rates:

"You can go through these and pick out who the form teacher is just by looking at what the kids have chosen." (field notes)

Mr Jennings cited two form tutors as clear examples of this; both taught 'practical', craft-based subjects and one of them was Mr Cliff. I knew from talking with Cliff and watching him with his tutees that he had not deliberately set out to recruit for his own specialism, yet I also knew, from the same evidence, that his meetings with tutees had influenced their decisions.

When I asked Mr Cliff about his advice to pupils over their 'provisional' choices he told me:

"If they know what they want to do, we discuss it. But if they've no ideas I make a few suggestions."

Variants of Mr Cliff's specialism were available either as a two year examination option or as part of the compulsory design course (which required pupils to choose any three from eight craft areas). I observed seven form meetings between Cliff and his tutees and noted that whenever a pupil hesitated over a choice in either the final option block (which included craft subjects) or within the compulsory design element Cliff would verbally list some of the subjects available in that area. In each case he listed subjects which reflected common gender stereotypes about the appropriateness of certain craft specialisms for each gender; the only craft subject which he mentioned to pupils of both sexes was his own.

Mr Cliff was not consciously 'selling' his subject, yet the combination of his 'reminder' of its existence, and the fact that none of his tutees disliked him nor particularly wanted to avoid lessons with him, was often enough to sway the undecided towards that choice. All but one of the 24 pupils in 3D 'provisionally' opted for a course which reflected Cliff's specialism.

In this section I have focused upon two of the form tutors whom I followed

throughout the subject options process in City Road. Each cared very much about the fate of their tutees and each was a subject teacher who found himself required to advise pupils about courses which were beyond his specialism. Yet the two tutors chose contrasting solutions to the demands which they faced.

As a teacher whose specialism did not rely upon the option decisions for its share of teaching resources in the upper school Mr Dean did not have a personal stake in the option process. It may be that this enabled him more easily to remain 'aloof' from the 'provisional' choices while Mr Cliff became actively involved in his tutees' decisions. This is not to say that Mr Cliff deliberately set out to serve his own departmental interests, I have explicitly argued that that was not the case. What I did observe was a thoughtful and caring form tutor who, despite consciously recognizing the dangers of his position, unconsciously reflected his concern for his specialism in the way in which he handled his meetings with tutees, ie. he reminded undecided pupils of the subject's existence. This prompt, coupled with the fact that Cliff's tutees got on well with him, and therefore had no reason to avoid the subject, led a disproportionate number to opt for his subject.

Two conclusions arise from this discussion. Firstly, that the form tutors were in an extraordinarily difficult position during the options. Their position as an 'adviser' allowed at least one subject specialist to inadvertantly influence the take-up of his subject during the early part of the options process. The following chapter considers the form tutors' problems further in an analysis of the participant roles and strategies during the official option meetings.

The second conclusion to arise from this discussion of the negotiation of 'provisional' option choices is that an understanding of the pupil perspective is essential: I stated above that "the fact that none of [Mr Cliff's] tutees disliked him" was also a factor in their decision to opt for his subject. This is not the same as saying that they actually wanted to go to his specialism because of him, otherwise they would not have been undecided and in need of any prompt as to the available options. The differences between positive and negative teacher attraction

are considered further in the next section of this chapter which focuses upon the criteria which the pupils applied in making their 'provisional' choices.

#### 2.4 THE PUPIL PERSPECTIVE: Pupils' choice criteria.

Before they entered the decision-making phase of the options process I interviewed each of the 69 pupils (42 boys and 27 girls) in forms 3A, 3C and 3D. These 'pre-option' interviews focused on the pupils' preparations for their option decisions and the kinds of influence which shaped their choice of subjects at that point in the process, ie. before they encountered either the option pattern or senior staff 'recommendations'.

In order to interview all the members of the three forms before they were presented with the staff 'recommendations' I had to see them in small groups. I managed to include each of the 69 pupils by holding 21 interviews each of approximately 25 minutes duration. I used the seating positions within the forms as a rough guide to friendship groups and chose interviewees accordingly; reasoning that they would feel more at ease if they were with their friends. I aimed at seeing the pupils in groups of three but on two occasions I saw groups of six pupils (girls who at the time did not obviously break down into any smaller cliques).

The 'pre-option' interviews were the first time that I removed pupils from a classroom and saw them in a private setting, ie. the office 'lent' me by one of the case study form tutors. I was still something of a stranger to the pupils and in addition to asking them about the options I tried to use the interviews as a chance to get to know them a little better. I addressed my questions to the group and tried to minimize the air of formality by making the interviews as conversational as possible. This meant that when certain issues were raised it was not always appropriate for me to go around each person in turn and ask them for their opinion



or experience: for example, if a pupil showed an awareness that the school required them to choose at least one science subject, I could not ask each of the other interviewees whether they also thought this was true. Such an approach might have seemed to be 'testing' them in some way, and this was exactly the kind of initial suspicion which I wanted to counter in the pupils. On certain other issues, however, I was able to gather information from each interviewee, for example, concerning their particular likes and dislikes among the staff; a question which helped many pupils to relax and often led to discussions which I could watch without having to direct the interview through questions. In the following account, therefore, I cannot offer quantitative summaries of the pupils' responses on each issue (the interviews simply were not designed to produce numbers), however, where I do have such information I have included it as a guide to the strength of feeling among the pupils I spoke with.

The amount of preparation which pupils had made for the options varied greatly, both between and within form groups. As I have already noted above, all pupils in the third year were 'coached' about choice criteria during assemblies, given a copy of the Options Booklet (which included a brief description of each subject available in the upper school), and taken to the school's Careers library to see the resources there and be addressed by the Head of Guidance. Such preparations ensured that all pupils knew that they had some element of 'choice' over which subjects they followed in their fourth and fifth years.

In addition to the talks given by members of the senior staff and guidance team, three of the eight third year form tutors devoted a great deal of time to the options in their form periods; inviting subject representatives to address their tutees. Two of my case study forms (3A and 3D) had been given talks in this way, while 3C had done no work on options during form periods.

The most striking difference between the pupils in 3C and the others that I interviewed was the increased confidence which the pupils in 3A and 3D seemed to

gain from the work they had done in form periods. They tended to be more aware of restrictions concerning compulsory subjects and often knew that they would have to choose at least one science and one humanity subject. Such restrictions had been mentioned to all pupils in official addresses but those who had dealt with the topic during form periods seemed to have appreciated such detail more than the pupils in 3C and certainly felt that they knew quite a lot about the subjects that were on offer.

The differences in the pupils' confidence about option choice and their familiarity with some of the restrictions imposed by the school did reflect the different amounts of preparation undertaken by their form tutors. However, there were no significant differences in the kind of criteria which pupils in the three forms applied when talking with me about the subjects which they hoped to take when they eventually entered the decision-making phase. This section explores the main criteria which emerged as I spoke with the pupils about any decisions which they had already made in their own minds and about any problems which they had encountered.

Ability in, and enjoyment of a subject were the criteria which pupils mentioned most frequently in relation to their choices. Almost every pupil I spoke with mentioned enjoyment or ability at some time and often the two would go hand in hand; they usually enjoyed the subjects they were most successful in and vice versa. As already noted these were officially approved criteria, and were so fundamental to pupil choice that they were largely taken for granted. Comments such as "I'm interested in it", "I like it" and "I'm quite good at it" were usually among the first explanations for any choice. As one pupil observed:

Anthony  
Clarke

"If I'm not capable at it, I'm not gonna take it am I?"

The pupils made their own intuitive judgements concerning their ability in different subjects. For example, they 'knew' that they found subject 'A' easier than subject 'B'. More specifically, 40 pupils (58% of the three case study forms)

mentioned their third year examination results as one guide to their ability in different subjects: 28 of the males (67%) and 12 of the female pupils (44%) in the three forms mentioned examination results in this way. Some interviewees were very deliberate in their use of examination results as a guide ("I'm going to do the ones I got best in"), and a good result almost always earned the subject further consideration, even where the pupil had previously decided not to opt for it.

Michael  
Cooper

"If I get a low mark I think 'Oh er, I won't be able to do that subject', but if I get a high mark I think 'I'm better in that subject'."

---

Simon Evans

"I wasn't gonna take history, but I got a good mark in it so I thought I'd take it."

However, a relatively 'poor' examination mark did not automatically rule out a subject. Some pupils performed badly in all possible option subjects and relied upon other criteria, while others disregarded examination results in subjects which they needed in order to fulfil their occupational aspirations (see below).

Although pupils' preferences for certain subjects were often closely related to their perceived 'ability' in them, gender stereotypes also seemed to influence the degrees of enjoyment and usefulness which were perceived in different subjects. This was seen most obviously in the attraction which Child Care held for 12 girls who, for example, simply offered "I like kids" as their reason for the choice. Similarly there was a feeling that Biology was the most obvious choice of science for girls: although only one girl actually stated that Physics was "for boys" because "it's got all boys' things in it like changing plugs", the majority of girls saw Biology as their most likely science option.

There was some evidence that girls from ethnic minority groups were particularly likely to choose subjects which mirrored traditional assumptions about the relation between gender and certain subjects. The small number of ethnic minority girls in the forms I followed makes any firm conclusion impossible,

however, it was interesting to note that all eight West Indian girls chose Biology as their only science in the upper school. This reflected a common stereotypical view of Biology as the most appropriate science for girls, especially those aiming at work in the 'caring' professions (Kelly et al, 1984).

Rita Lewis

[West Indian] [On her reasons for choosing Biology]

"If anybody in my family was sick, ain't gonna doctor for themselves, I could take care of them. I could just go 'round helping people."

Occupational aspirations were very important in deciding pupils upon certain subjects which they felt were essential for their chosen career. 34 (49%) of the pupils in the three forms I interviewed had some notion of 'what they wanted to be' when they finished their education. These aspirations were almost always in line with societal stereotypes of male and female roles in the post-school world, and included an odd mix of occupations which seemed to originate in the working class culture of the surrounding community and the images of 'glamour' and excitement attached to some jobs by the media. For example, of the 24 boys (57% of males in the three forms) who could name the job which they hoped to get, some wanted to be bricklayers, carpenters or electricians while others aspired to becoming pilots and stunt-men. Ten girls (37% of females in the three forms) mentioned particular occupations which ranged from fashion modelling and air hostess, to nursery teaching and health care. It also emerged that a number of girls saw Typing as a form of occupational stand-by: some, who had no particular occupation in mind, felt that Typing was a 'useful' subject for a girl to have. Others saw Typing as offering an alternative if their chosen job was too elusive.

DG "What's the attraction of Typing?"

Linda Thomas "'Cause I thought if I change me mind about being an air hostess, I could be a secretary."

Ten girls in my three case study forms (37%) went on to choose Typing as one of

their 'provisional' options.

As I have already noted, the senior staff and Head of Guidance encouraged the pupils to take account of their occupational goals when making their decisions. To help the pupils do this the school's careers library offered relatively easy access to a great deal of information about the requirements of different occupations, not only in the form of printed material but through the advice of a very dedicated Head of Guidance whom most of the pupils quite liked. However, the large majority of pupils' only visit to the careers library was the brief compulsory one paid by each form during the 'pre-option' build up: a rather hurried visit which allowed only a few minutes for 'hands on' experience of the different materials. Many pupils mentioned that they wanted to go back to the careers library at some point but had not "got 'round to it yet". Such follow-up visits were made particularly difficult by the industrial action which forced pupils to leave the school premises at lunch times, which (according to the Head of Guidance) was precisely the time of day when most of its customers had used the careers library in previous years.

10 of my 69 interviewees mentioned that they had paid additional visits to the careers library, only one of them was female. Each of these pupils had incorporated any advice about specific subjects in making their decisions. However, the perceived importance of occupational requirements was not limited to those pupils who had re-visited the careers library. On each occasion that a pupil told me of an occupational aspiration I asked them whether it had decided them on any particular choices; 19 pupils (56% of all those with an occupational target) saw at least one of their choices as directly related to that goal. The eleven males and eight females who stated that their occupational aspirations had influenced their choices had drawn upon a variety of sources of information. For example, one boy saw no need to re-visit the careers library:

Kenny Tate        "Well, me Mam's mate, her son's a pilot an' I was asking him about it. And he told me what grades I need and all that."

Whatever the source of the advice, if a pupil believed that his/her occupational goal required one or more specific school subjects, they would always cite the subject(s) as choices which they wanted to make. The importance which the pupils attached to such subjects could be gauged from the fact that even where their third year examination performance had been disappointing, if a subject was felt to be necessary for a particular job, that subject would be cited as a choice. The following transcript illustrates this: Sally wanted to be a nursery teacher, Linda saw herself as an air hostess.

DG            [In the third year examinations] "Did any of you do worse than you expected to?"

Sally        "Yeah, Chemistry."

DG            "And has that put you off Chemistry?"

Sally        "Yeah." (...)

Linda        "German."

DG            "Will that affect whether you do it or not?"

Linda        "No."

DG            "It's not put you off it all?"

Linda        "No."

In this case Sally assumed that Chemistry was not an important subject for a prospective nursery teacher and was able to drop the subject without further worry. Linda, however, had been told by a member of staff that two languages would be necessary if she were to become an air hostess: rather than dissuading Linda from that occupation (as he told me he had intended), the information convinced her of the need to continue with the language options.

Although 35 (51%) of the interviewees in the three forms had no specific occupations in mind, their assumptions about the nature and demands of the post-school employment market did have some influence over their judgements. For

example, Computer Studies was widely seen as "the thing of the future" (field notes) and many pupils envisaged themselves working with computers in some way when they left school. Pupils' beliefs about the job market also led some to question the usefulness of several subjects, perhaps most importantly, many (both male and female), unaware of some employers' use of foreign language qualifications as a selection device, saw modern languages as "a waste of time". Unfortunately I cannot offer any numerical data on the prevalence of this view since it only emerged during the later interviews when I began to challenge the pupils over why so few mentioned languages as possible options.

Paul Dixon      "You might go to Germany to get a job - but it's very unlikely."

---

Susan Robson    "You're not gonna need it [German] for a job are you?"

---

Paul Jarvis      "I can't see that it's really gonna help much, 'cause the chances of going to France or Germany or something... I mean they say 'German', why not RUSSIAN or something? I mean you stand just as much chance of going to Russia."

Although, as a result of so little careers guidance their application of staff advice was sometimes simplistic, in their use of 'ability', enjoyment and occupational requirements as choice criteria, the pupils were acting in accordance with the 'open coaching' by senior staff during the options build-up. However, this was not true of all the criteria which the pupils applied.

Teacher attractiveness was the subject of a great deal of criticism in the 'open coaching' but continued to be a significant factor in the decisions of several pupils. Most pupils associated each subject with a particular member of staff. For example, the teacher who had taken them for that lesson in the past, or one who was a familiar figure in the school generally and whose specialism was known.

Pupils' expectations of their teachers seem to be very much the same wherever and whenever they are investigated (Woods 1983: 54-62, gives a short summary of

earlier work in this area). For example, my findings have much in common with those of previous writers such as Gannaway (1976) and Furlong (1976), especially in relation to pupils' judgements of their teachers and lessons. In this section, however, I do not wish to simply repeat the work of others, rather my aim is to outline the perspectives which my case study pupils held concerning the City Road staff and to indicate the consequences of such judgements when they made their 'provisional' choices. Therefore I have excluded from the calculations all references to teachers whose specialism was compulsory in the upper school.

I asked each of the 69 pupils in the three case study forms whether there were any members of staff whom they particularly liked or disliked: most teachers were simply described as being "alright", however, 43 pupils (62% of the interviewees) did mention by name one or more teachers of optional subjects whom they particularly liked or disliked. A higher proportion of the boys made such comments: 29 boys (69%) cited one or more members of staff compared with 14 (52%) of the girls in the three forms.

The majority of comments, by pupils of both sexes, concerned teachers whom they disliked (ie. 'negative' teacher attraction). In total 38 pupils (55% of the interviewees) named at least one member of staff whom they strongly disliked, ie. 26 (62%) of the males and 12 (44%) of the females in the three forms. Some cited more than one teacher and between them these 38 pupils made a total of 55 'negative' nominations.

When I asked the pupils to explain their feelings it became clear that they were particularly sensitive to how the teacher controlled the lesson. A basic requirement was that the teacher should keep order, since failure to do so also ruled out the possibility of meeting another requirement, ie. that they should be able to "teach", to "get some work done".

Paul Jarvis      "She can't control the class. In the first year I think, she ended up kicking a lad out the class - she was crying and everything. And when that happens the class knows that they've got on top of her. And then she won't be able to control the class at all. And through that, you can't work."



The incident which Paul discussed happened more than two years before the interview, yet he remembered it as signalling the weakness of the teacher and identified it as the point where that class moved beyond her control.

If too little control was seen as a negative characteristic, the same was also true of too much control. Shouting and the 'petty' use of power were the most common complaints made against staff during these interviews.

Dhilip Desai     "He keeps nagging at you. Say like you're sitting somewhere else the next day - he keeps shouting at you to get back where you usually sit."

---

James Murray     "She goes 'Stop leaning on the wall', and I wasn't leaning on the wall, so I goes 'I'm not leaning on the wall', she says, 'Well before you do.'"

Being able to strike a balance between the extremes of classroom control and apply rules "fairly" between different pupils were vital elements in the way teachers were judged. As already indicated above, a teacher's ability to control a class was important because it laid the foundation for any work which might be done, but teachers also had to demonstrate their competence in the subject itself: any sign that the staff were not knowledgeable in the subject could have important consequences for pupils' view of a teacher.

Paul Jarvis     "We've got this new [piece of equipment] - I dont think he [the teacher] had ever used one before. So he had to get the teacher from next door - leave his class and actually come in and show us how to use it."

Another necessary characteristic of "good" teaching, in the pupils' eyes, was to provide written evidence of work. Some pupils claimed that it was difficult to revise without extensive classnotes, to others it seemed that an absence of written notes in lessons indicated that the teacher simply was not "teaching".

Ben Watson     "Some teachers just dont teach you anything.  
Like Mr Shelton he just tells it you, and by the end of the

year you've done about one page in a book."

Some pupils had experienced particular 'problems' with individual teachers in the past which could ruin the possibility for any kind of constructive relationship between the two in the future. For example, where the pupil felt the teacher had punished them too severely or treated them differently because of an ascribed characteristic, such as ethnic origin or gender.

Wayne Johnson

[West Indian] "... you pop your head 'round the corner, he says 'Move sunburnt face or I'll put your head through the keyhole'."

---

Sandra Garner "...he keeps staring at me. (...) Everyone says 'Look at Mr (...) he's staring at you.' He'll sit calling the register staring at you."

I had no way of establishing the truth of these accusations but, like the other occasions where pupils reported a dislike for any member of staff, at this point in the options process it was the pupils' interpretation of the teacher's action which was most important.

25 pupils (36% of the interviewees) stated that they particularly "liked" one or more teachers of optional subjects (ie. positive teacher attraction). As was the case for 'negative' nominations, so a greater proportion of male pupils made positive nominations; 19 (45%) of the boys interviewed named at least one teacher as someone they particularly liked. This compared with only 6 (22%) of the girls in the three forms. The 25 pupils made a total of 29 positive nominations.

Being "liked" and seen as a "good teacher" did not simply mean avoiding any of the problems noted immediately above in relation to the pupils' dislikes. To be "fair", able to control a lesson and know the subject were qualities which the pupils expected of any teacher: in addition to satisfying these basic criteria, "good" teachers were associated with possession of other qualities.

Almost all the "liked" teachers were said to have a good sense of humour ("He's

a good teacher, he makes you laugh"). Also, some staff were felt to have personal qualities which, although difficult for the pupils to put into words, were very highly valued. For example, I asked Sally Green why she liked a certain member of staff. After a few seconds thought Sally replied with a shrug of her shoulders:

Sally Green      "She makes the subject SOUND easy. She can explain it better than what other teachers can."

The ability to "explain" the subject was very highly valued. Although the pupils often found it difficult to express what they meant by this, it was clear that a certain amount of patience was required:

Tony Appleby      "Those ['good'] teachers right, if you think you're not very good, they take you on your own and tell you how to do things."

All of the criteria behind teacher attraction which I have noted above (both negative and positive) were spoken of by pupils of various abilities. There was some discrepancy between pupils over what constituted "too much" work. Three of the less-able pupils valued "soft" teachers who "don't push you too hard". Notwithstanding this, however, overall there was agreement over the characteristics which separated the popular from the most disliked teachers.

The strength of feeling shown during these interviews led me to hypothesize that negative nominations would have a greater influence over subject choice than positive ones. ie. to many pupils a strongly negative feeling, about a teacher whom they 'knew' might teach a particular subject in the upper school, would be sufficient cause to avoid the subject. By contrast, a positive nomination was neither necessary nor sufficient cause for a particular choice since most teachers were "alright", and the pupils could not guarantee which member of staff they would receive in each subject.

There is no completely satisfactory way of quantifying the influence of any single choice criterion, however, a cautious 'test' of this hypothesis is possible

by comparing the pupils' nominations of liked and disliked subject teachers against their 'provisional' choices (ie. the decisions made within the option pattern but before the senior staff 'recommendations' were known). Such an analysis will show to what extent negative and positive teacher nominations were associated with the choice of the teachers' specialist subjects.

Of the 55 separate negative nominations which were made, in 38 cases (69% of all negative nominations) the associated optional subject was not chosen. This pattern was true for pupils of each gender: of the 39 separate negative nominations made by male pupils, in 23 cases the associated subject was not chosen. The subjects associated with 15 of the 16 negative nominees cited by female pupils were not chosen.

Therefore, in the majority of cases where a pupil named a teacher as one whom s/he disliked, that teacher's specialist subject was not chosen 'provisionally'.

Of the 29 separate positive nominations, 13 (45% of all positive nominations) were later chosen as 'provisional' options. 10 of the 23 positive nominations by male pupils and 3 of 6 female nominations were reflected in their 'provisional' choices. Therefore, in no more than half of the cases where a pupil named a teacher as one whom s/he liked was that teacher's specialist subject chosen 'provisionally'.

Clearly such figures cannot be conclusive, not least because teacher attraction may be related to other factors such as enjoyment of a subject. However, the associations between negative and positive nomination of a teacher and the pupils' subsequent 'provisional' options are in the direction predicted by my original hypothesis, ie. that negative nominations would have a greater influence over subject choice than positive ones.

Friendship was a choice criterion which the senior and guidance staff attacked throughout the options process. As I have already shown in my discussion of the 'open coaching', the staff feared that pupils would collude over their choices so as to be with their friends in the upper school and this was one of the possible

criteria which I asked the pupils about. Some appeared irritated by the repeated warnings not to copy from friends, but almost all claimed to be following the advice. The reason for not copying which was most frequently cited by the pupils was that their varying abilities and preferences made a nonsense of collusion. Almost all pupils, of very different abilities, used the same arguments.

Ian Taylor        "[Your friends] might be good in one lesson, but we might be CRAP at THEIR lesson. You go to their lesson and you don't know what it's about."

Some pupils responded to the motivational elements of options discussions by claiming that a break from their friends might help them:

Arif Aslam        "Friends are good things to have but they won't make any difference in [my choices] (...) when I'm with them I usually get mucked up, and mess around and get into trouble."

There was very little copying between pupils during this stage in the option process. In my case study forms I only came across two pupils who had consciously copied their choices. The similar patterns of take-up which sometimes arose between friends were usually a result of shared interests and perceptions of subjects and teachers, rather than any deliberate collusion.

Parents were portrayed by senior staff as important partners in the pupils' choices. The 'open coaching' by senior staff encouraged all pupils to involve their parents in the option process, however, during the pre-option stage few pupils did anything more than 'warn' their parents that they would be asked into the school in the near future. Almost all of the pupils that I interviewed saw some role for their parents in the options process and expected them to be present during the decision-making. There were, however, strongly contrasting views as to whom should have most influence. Only a handful of pupils thought their parents should have the final say:

Lee Rourke "They know more about subjects than what we do don't they?"

The vast majority of pupils expected to have the last word themselves. Some pupils claimed such power as of right. For example, one girl argued that she should decide "'Cause it's [me] that's got to do the work isn't it?" Most pupils justified their anticipated dominance by reference to their superior knowledge of the system and their own abilities.

Ashley  
Roberts

"I goes to me Dad, 'We have Expressive Arts and Humanities.' He goes, 'What are they?' 'Cause when he went to school they didn't have these lessons."

---

Sandra Garner "...it's what I want to do, what I can do. Because SHE [mother] don't know if I can do it."

Although there was some disagreement about the role of their parents, all the pupils that I interviewed expected the staff to play an advisory role only. Each of the interviewees expected to have real choice concerning their option decisions. As the next chapter will demonstrate, many pupils were not confirmed in this view.

In such a comparatively short section I have only been able to deal with the choice criteria that were most commonly used and discussed by the pupils during the 'pre-option' stage. Some of the 'coaching' strategies may have had some influence upon the pupils' perception of the process and their own interests. For example, in the case of 'ability', 'enjoyment', occupational requirements and the influence of friends, the pupils acted largely in accordance with the advice given by staff. However, the importance of strongly negative feelings about certain teachers and the rejection of a fundamental role for parents by some pupils, meant that there were also areas of conflict between the school and pupil perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

Each group of actors who were involved in the subject options process held different perspectives concerning their aims and the demands which they faced.

Mr Jennings and the Headteacher designed and (with the aid of two of the school's Deputies) administered a system of option choice which aimed at reducing the problems associated with the design of a workable fourth year timetable and improving the school's performance in external examinations. In their concern to serve, what they saw as, the pupils' 'best interests' the senior staff assumed a central role in relation to subject choice in the school. In so doing they consciously formalized and reduced the role of subject teachers as choice advisers.

Subject teachers frequently complained about the options system to me, but rarely took their comments to members of senior staff. For many subject teachers a great deal was at stake during the options and, despite their reduced role in the 'new' organization, there was evidence that a number of teachers continued to 'coach' pupils in ways which sometimes reflected departmental interests.

As subject specialists who were also charged with a guidance role the form tutors were in a very difficult position. The tutors whom I followed each cared deeply about their responsibilities, yet they found different solutions to the dilemmas which their position raised. While one tutor simply collected his pupils' choices another saw each pupil individually and, although he consciously recognized the dangers of his position, appears to have acted in a way which inadvertantly served the interests of his subject department.

The pupils were subject to a great deal of 'advice' over their option choices. They were addressed in assemblies, taken to the careers library, given booklets and spoken to by subject teachers. The criteria which the pupils applied in judging the merits of different subjects may have been influenced by this 'coaching' to some extent. In accordance with the advice they received, many pupils considered their ability, enjoyment and occupational requirements when considering subject choice.

However, despite staff advice to the contrary, there was some evidence to suggest that pupils' disapproval of certain teachers may have influenced their 'provisional' decisions. It was also the case that the vast majority of pupils, whilst seeing some advisory role for parents and teachers, felt that they (the pupils) should have the greatest say when it came to option choice.

Therefore each of the groups of actors involved in the options process faced a different set of demands and they held complex, sometimes conflicting, perspectives concerning the system and the criteria which should influence pupils' decisions. The following chapter builds upon this one and examines how the participants in the face-to-face negotiation of option choice handled their roles. Four of the groups involved have been introduced in this chapter, a fifth participant group (the parents) will also be considered.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. There is no single authoritative statement concerning the nature of all option systems in use throughout England and Wales. However, some form of curriculum choice at 14-plus is now accepted as the norm in the majority of State schools in this country (Hurman, 1978: 19-42).
2. I gained an understanding of departmental perspectives and practices during the options process by talking with subject teachers and by interviewing either a senior teacher or the Head of department in several subjects: these included Mathematics, English, Modern languages, the various humanities and the Head of Science.



## CHAPTER 3: THE FACE-TO-FACE NEGOTIATION OF OPTION CHOICE

### 3.1 THE NEGOTIATION OF PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

### 3.2 PARTICIPANT ROLES AND STRATEGIES IN THE 'OFFICIAL' MEETINGS

- a) The pupil role
- b) The parental role
- c) The staff roles: a "team performance"
- d) Channelling strategies
- e) The limitations of staff power

### 3.3 THE FOURTH YEAR: 'Post-option' selection and renegotiation

- a) The loss of senior staff centrality
- b) Successful renegotiation by pupils
- c) Successful renegotiation by subject departments

## CONCLUSION AND NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

### CHAPTER 3: THE FACE-TO-FACE NEGOTIATION OF OPTION CHOICE

"It's not the kid's choice any more.

Well, it STILL IS a free choice really, if the kid INSISTS on doing something he WILL get it."

Mr Jennings discussing pupil choice in the options process  
(field notes)

The negotiations which decided pupils' subject choices took place at various points in the options process. Mr Jennings' decisions concerning the design of the option pattern and the 'open' and 'hidden' coaching of pupils were all of consequence in determining at least some 'provisional' option choices. I noted in the previous chapter that the 'provisional' choices represented only the first stage of the choice process; a process which took up most of the academic year and, for some pupils, continued into the following year. The majority of my case study pupils went on to change at least one of their 'provisional' subject options before the end of their third year, while a few also experienced changes during the fourth year itself. The first sections of this chapter examine the negotiations which took place during the main body of the choice process, focusing in particular upon the 'official' meetings. The final section will briefly consider the fourth year renegotiations which involved members of my case study forms.

One of the female pupils whom I interviewed during the option preparations left the City Road roll during her third year, however, the remaining 68 pupils (42 boys and 26 girls) in the three case study forms went on to complete the subject option process. Of those pupils only 7 (10%) had no further meetings with members of staff and made no changes to their 'provisional' choices. Therefore the majority of my case study pupils were involved in further negotiations concerning their choice of options. The parent(s) of 38 of my case study pupils (56% of the three forms) visited the school and took part in 'official' option meetings with their child, a form tutor and a member of senior staff (Mr Jennings, the Head and two male deputies

handled most negotiations although the Head of Guidance took their place in one meeting which I observed). Of these pupils 27 (71% of those having an official meeting) changed at least one of their 'provisional' options before the end of their third year.

From an examination of Mr Jennings' records I established that at least 35 members of 3A, C & D were seen informally by either Jennings or their form tutor. Some of these went on to have official meetings which reconsidered their choices, however, most of them had no such meeting. In all, 23 pupils (34% of my three case study forms) had no official option meetings but did experience informal enquiries about their choices from Mr Jennings and/or their form tutor. Of these pupils 17 (74% of those who were only seen informally) changed at least one 'provisional' option before the end of the academic year: these experiences are summarized in Figure 3.1 (1).

Some of the alterations which were made between the 'provisional' choices and those listed at the end of the year were the result of pupils simply 'changing their mind'. Within my three case study forms, however, it was very rare for pupils to decide to change an option unless they had been advised to reconsider by a member of staff. Typically the staff sought to 'steer' the pupil away from, or towards, a particular subject, in line with their expectations concerning the pupil. Stephen Ball, after Goffman, has referred to the teachers' attempts to lower pupil's expectations as examples of "cooling out" (Ball, 1981: 135). Alternatively, some pupils who were thought to have 'undersold themselves' were encouraged to raise their sights ("warming up").

The next chapter focuses upon the patterns of selection which emerged during the options decisions and draws evidence from all stages of the process. This chapter concentrates upon the face-to-face interactions and negotiations which decided many option 'choices'. In particular I have chosen to examine the official option meetings which involved pupils and their parents in my three case study forms. These were usually arranged a little in advance and I was able to observe 33

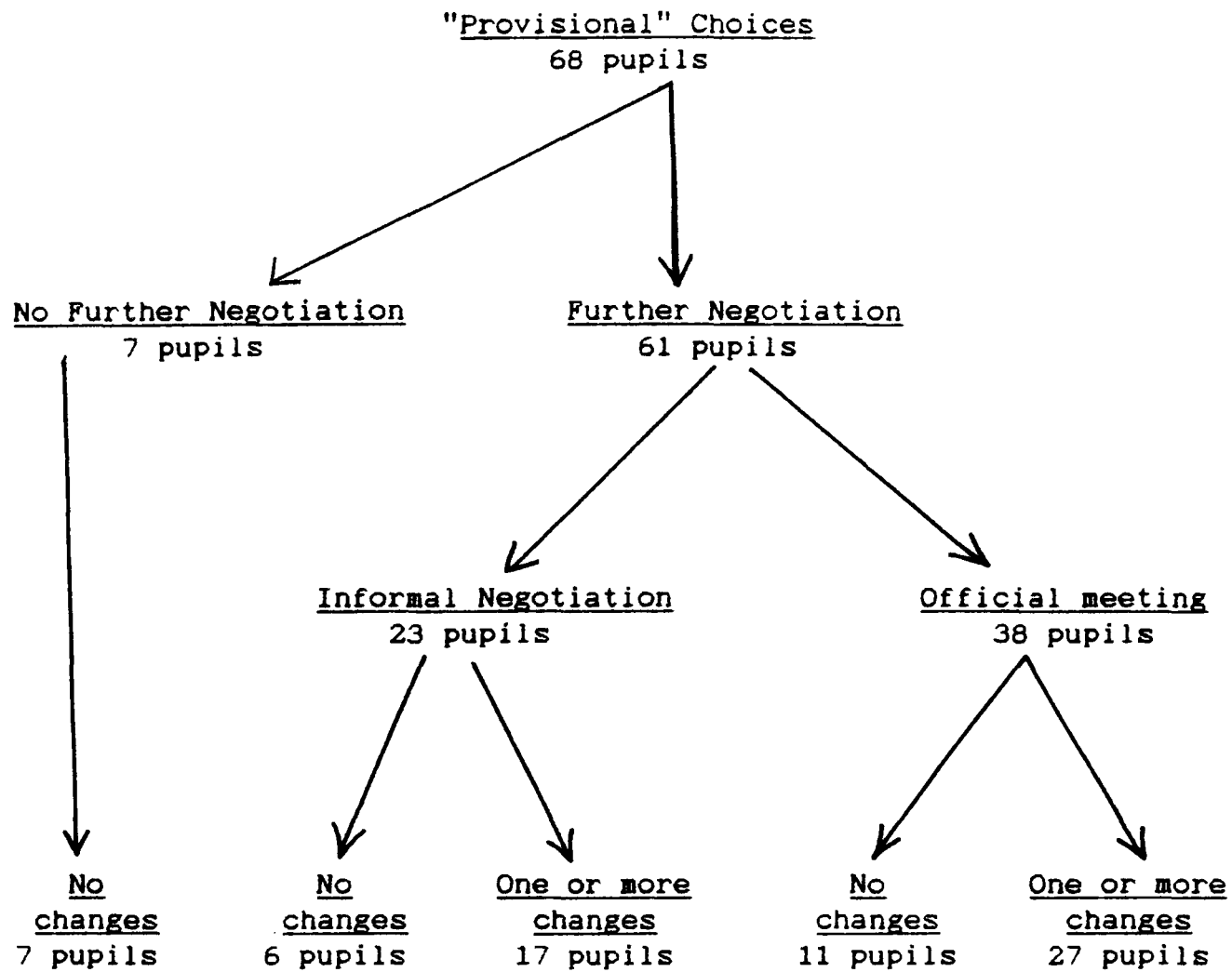


FIGURE 3.1: EXPERIENCE OF THE THIRD YEAR OPTIONS PROCESS BY PUPILS  
IN THREE MIXED ABILITY FORMS

of the 38 official negotiations which involved my case study pupils. In contrast the informal negotiations frequently took place with little or no warning; consequently although I was able to establish that 35 case study pupils were seen in this way, I was able to observe fewer such informal challenges (26 individual informal negotiations were observed).

In addition to the greater number of official negotiations which I observed, I have chosen to focus upon the official meetings for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the official meetings offered the most complete study of the relationships between those involved in the negotiation of option choice, ie. in addition to pupils and parents, the official meetings involved both senior staff and form tutors. Secondly, because they involved pupils' parents, the official meetings were viewed with some trepidation by staff: it will be interesting to note how, despite parental involvement, the staff managed to dominate the negotiations. A third, and perhaps the most important reason for examining these meetings, is that negotiations at no other stage of the process revealed so dramatically the extent, and limitations, of staff power over subject option choice. However, I do not wish to minimize the significance of the informal negotiations and during my discussion of the participant roles which emerged during the official meetings I will, where appropriate, also note details of the informal interviews.

Although the official meetings were often held at quite short notice and the different tutors sometimes negotiated simultaneously I was able to observe 33 of the 38 official option meetings which involved pupils in my case study forms. In addition to observing the majority of negotiations in all three of my case-study forms, I also witnessed the 'styles' of each of the members of senior staff who took part in these meetings, ie. Mr Jennings, the Headteacher, two deputies and the Head of Guidance (2).

### 3.1 THE NEGOTIATION OF PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

Because this chapter concentrates upon the negotiations which involved those pupils whose parents came into the school for official meetings, it might be supposed that I am introducing a biased element into the cases under study. Certainly the school's teachers were of the view that the parents of a particular 'sort' of pupil were most likely to attend (ie. the parents of successful rather than the less able or troublesome pupils).

In contrast to these official expectations, the experiences of my case study forms suggested to me that certain school-based factors were also related to the number of parents who attended official option meetings. The official meetings which I observed did not reflect any obvious bias in the 'type' of pupils who were involved. Also, the parents who attended demonstrated a variety of degrees of understanding of, and interest in, the workings of the school. Rather than simply reflecting the nature of the pupil and/or the parents, the number of official meetings which took place in my three case study forms seemed to be related to the actions of the form tutor. I wish to explain these points a little more clearly before moving on to examine the official meetings themselves.

All members of the school's pastoral staff were pessimistic about the chances of "getting parents in" to discuss their childrens' options. As I noted in the previous chapter, Mr Jennings credited the exceptionally high turn out for the "new" options organization, introduced the previous year, to a letter which he sent to all third year parents, "threatening" (his words) that their childrens' timetables could not be finalized without parental involvement. Because the industrial action forced any parental involvement to take place during working hours, Mr Jennings felt that he could not make such threats as part of the 'contingency' organization and therefore relied upon the pupils to encourage their parents to participate.

Each of the third year form tutors arranged times when they could see their

pupils' parents during the school day. All the tutors asked their pupils to inform their parents, and some sent letters of their own which emphasized the importance of the option choices. Despite the staff's efforts there was a widespread feeling, amongst those I met, that the working class nature of the school's catchment area meant that parental interest was generally low. In particular I was told that the parents of disruptive and less-able pupils were usually absent from school functions.

Head of the

3rd Year "Our parents, really the attendance is pretty poor at most school functions. (...) You can predict who's gonna come in and who isn't, you know. It's like everything else, some parents are far more interested, you know, want [their children] to do well, whereas others just send them here because it's somewhere they've got to go."

---

A third year "I can tell you now who'll come in and who won't.  
form tutor It's the same faces every time. (...) The sad thing is that we never see the ones that we really NEED to... You know like [names a very disruptive pupil]." (field notes)

The belief that a low parental turn out was inevitable, given the contingency organization, was not supported by the experiences of my case study forms. In 3A, C & D the level of parental involvement seemed to be related to the actions of the form tutors, specifically to their preparedness to "chase up kids" about arranging an interview. This seemed to overshadow the amount of form work carried out in the 'pre-option' phase. Hence, although Mr Dean had done no preparation for the options in 3C form periods, by sending a letter home to parents and daily reminding his tutees about the timing of future meetings, he 'achieved' interviews with the parents of 12 of his 21 tutees (57%). In contrast, Mr Palmer spent a great deal of time in form periods talking about options choice and inviting in guest speakers from subject departments. Having gone to such lengths during the build-up to option choice, Mr Palmer felt he had done all he could to prepare 3A and relied upon the pupils to encourage their parents to take part.

Mr Palmer to 3A during two form periods (field notes):

"I'm not gonna run 'round after you, you've been told when I can see people, now it's up to you."

---

"They're your options. If you can't be bothered, it's your decision... I've done as much as I can, now it's up to you."

Mr Palmer felt that the school sent so many letters to parents that one more would have made no difference and preferred to rely on the pupils themselves. As he had anticipated, only a minority of 3A pupils arranged interviews for their parents (9 out of 24 pupils, ie. 38%).

In form 3D, who had also experienced a great deal of preparation during form periods, Mr Cliff continued to 'push' his pupils over the question of 'official' meetings. Not only did he send a letter home which stressed the importance of the decisions, but also insisted that if a parent could not visit the school or be contacted by telephone, their signature would be required on the option pattern as proof that they approved of the child's choices. These measures ensured that (short of forgery) the parents were at least aware of the decisions being made and, despite the difficulties faced by some parents, led to meetings with parents and guardians of 17 of the 23 pupils in 3D at that time (74%).

Mr Cliff was proud of having seen so many parents and openly attributed it to his strategy of putting 'pressure' on the pupils.

Mr Cliff "Yes I saw most of mine - which I was quite pleased about - but only because I think I put so much into it. It was HARD and you were constantly chasing up kids."

By requiring his tutees to 'prove' that their parents could not attend option meetings during the school day, Cliff undoubtedly influenced the high turn out among 3D's parents.

Table 3.1 summarizes the levels of parental participation in the three forms. I wish to stress that I am not arguing that the form tutors' actions were the only factor involved in the level of parental attendance: clearly those parents who were



TABLE 3.1: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THREE MIXED ABILITY FORMS

Form	Amount of options preparation	Tutor 'pressure' to arrange visit	Parents attended	
			%	N
3A	High	Low	38	9
3C	Low	Moderate	57	12
3D	High	High	74	17

least supportive of the school are likely to have been amongst those who did not attend. Also, within each form a greater proportion of female pupils arranged interviews which may suggest that the girls encouraged their parents to participate more than male pupils. However, this pattern was set within the broader levels of parental involvement in the three forms. For example, only six of Palmer's twelve female pupils arranged official meetings compared with four of the six in Mr Dean's form and eight of the nine in Mr Cliff's group. Similarly, the patterns did not seem to emanate from any differences in the social class composition of the forms: unfortunately I was forced to concentrate on a smaller number of pupils during the latter stages of the field work and I only collected detailed information on the social class of pupils in forms 3A and 3C. However, it was interesting to note that although, during the options process, both 3A and 3C had two pupils each from non-manual backgrounds, in 3A (Mr Palmer's form) neither arranged official meetings whereas the parents of both those in 3C (Mr Dean's form) did attend.

Therefore, it does seem to be the case that to an important degree the incidence of 'official' meetings was negotiated within the mixed ability form groups: form tutors employed strategies which either 'pressured' their tutees (3C and 3D) or allowed them relatively easy 'let-outs' (3A). In this sense, the 'lack of interest' demonstrated by some parents, was partly a function of the tutor's work with the form.

"Getting parents in" to discuss their children's choices was, however, only the first stage involved in negotiating their involvement in the options process. The following section of this chapter examines the roles adopted by the participants once the official meetings got under way.

### 3.2 PARTICIPANT ROLES AND STRATEGIES IN THE 'OFFICIAL' MEETINGS

Once the parents were in the school the senior staff and form tutors faced a difficult set of demands. Within the restrictions of the option pattern, which determined the fourth year timetable, the staff aimed to 'guide' the pupil into the choices which they felt were most appropriate to the child's abilities, interests and occupational aspirations, ie. the choices which they felt were "in the kid's best interests" (Mr Jennings). The staff's position was complicated by the fact that the system was meant to embody a real degree of pupil and parent participation. Indeed, as I noted in the previous chapter, the staff themselves remained convinced that an element of 'choice' was a vital ingredient in the options system. These potentially conflicting demands made the official meetings a fascinating study which revealed much about the power relations between senior staff, form tutors, parents and pupils in City Road.

In the following sections I want to explore how the participants handled the demands of their position and negotiated subject choices during the official option meetings which involved members of my three case study forms. I am principally concerned with the actors' perceptions of their roles and the negotiating strategies which they used in an attempt to fulfil their perception of what were the 'right' choices.

The senior staff's notion of the 'proper' influences upon pupil choice have already been considered in the previous chapter. In addition, the next chapter uses data from the entire options process to outline the most important criteria which lay behind the staff challenges to pupils' 'provisional' choices. In preparation for that chapter, and in explaining the roles and strategies of the participants in the official meetings, the current section contains further detail as to some of the factors which the staff weighed in judging the merits of pupils' 'provisional' options.

There was no such thing as a 'typical' options negotiation. Each of the 33 official meetings which I observed was given a unique quality because of the histories and personalities of the participants. However, some general patterns did emerge during the meetings and these form the basis for the remainder of this section.

In order to give some impression of how the meetings were handled by the participants I have chosen to quote at length from my transcript of one official meeting which I observed. In many ways the meeting was unusual. It involved a pupil (Carol Barber) who was seen by staff as being amongst the 'least-able' of the pupil population. Also, Carol's mother took a more active role in the conversation than the majority of parents whom I met. I have chosen to use this meeting as the starting point for my analysis of the participant roles and strategies because it so clearly demonstrates some of the problems which the staff faced in realizing their views of the pupils' "best interests". In this case the two members of staff and the parent accepted that the pupil had very real academic problems: initially they disagreed as to their consequences for her subject choice but, by the end of the meeting, the school's perception of the most appropriate choices was the one realized in Carol's subject options.

Carol's meeting illustrates a number of features which were common to many of the official negotiations which I observed. Where this meeting departed from the common pattern, or where exceptional cases need to be noted, I will use data from other official negotiations.

The following tape transcription represents almost the entire official options meeting between a member of senior staff, a form tutor (in this case, Mr Cliff), a pupil (Carol Barber) and her mother (3).

- |   |       |   |
|---|-------|---|
| 1 | Tutor | "[We're here] to help Carol choose which subjects we  |
| 2 |       | feel are BEST FOR HER, and the subjects she's best at |

3 as well. (...) Now we've gone over it very briefly,  
 4 Carol and I, and I've written them down in pencil some  
 5 of the things perhaps she'd LIKE to do ['provisional'  
 6 choices]. So when we go through it if there are any  
 7 which we would like to change, then it's no trouble  
 8 for me to rub them out and change them over.  
 9 Now also, I've got recommendations from other  
 10 teachers on how Carol has performed in the other  
 11 subjects, which also help us to get AN OVERALL PICTURE  
 12 of how Carol is achieving. Okay?"

13 Mother "Yes."  
 (...)
 14 Tutor "Out of these four columns [in the option pattern]  
 15 she's had to choose one subject. In the first column  
 16 she's chose to do Typing."

17 Mother "Yeah, she's been telling me alot about the Typing,  
 18 you know."

19 Tutor "Er, but I don't know if she's gonna do very well at  
 20 Typing, because of reading and other problems."

21 Mother "It's a handicap isn't it."

22 Senior "It's unfortunate. I would go along with what Mr.  
 23 Cliff has said there, she might get very frustrated if  
 24 she finds that there were alot of errors creeping in  
 25 because of her basic language problems."

26 Mother "Yeah, 'cause she's got to be able to spell everything  
 27 hasn't she?"

28 Senior "Yes."

29 Tutor "So there's ever such a lot of English involved in  
 30 that, and as [the Senior] says, if she's just gonna  
 31 get frustrated she really isn't gonna do herself much  
 32 good."

33 Senior "Can I just say on that, that if she wanted to give  
 34 Typing a go, there's no reason why she couldn't come  
 35 in her LAST year to the night classes that we have on  
 36 the school premises."

37 Mother "See, maybe if there's a thing she really wants to do  
 38 it MIGHT... be best..."

39 Tutor "Yeah."

40 Senior "Yeah, yeah."

41 Mother "... to... to ..."

42 Senior "Yeah, that's right, but a TWO  
 43 YEAR course on it, I think would be too demanding for

44 her.  
 45 For her, coming one night a week..."

46 Mother [To Carol] "What do you think about that Carol?"

47 Tutor "When she's in her fifth year she can come to a night  
 48 class, when - "

49 Mother "- Yes, I understand what you're  
 50 saying, and as I say, if she really wants to do it, it  
 51 might bring her on."

52 Senior "Oh yes, I agree with that. Certainly have a go at it  
 53 definitely."

54 Tutor "What I suggest there - I mean in the end it's Carol's  
 55 choice, she's got to do the work - was perhaps Applied  
 56 Science, which is not as involved as Chemistry or  
 57 Physics ... it's got elements of all those. And  
 58 there's a lot more PRACTICAL work, a lot more  
 59 experiments. There's not so much sitting down and  
 60 writing, she's getting up and doing things, which I  
 61 feel... Carol might do better at."

62 Mother "I think what some might say, she's got a lack of  
 63 concentration, I find, I don't know if you find the  
 64 same. When she's doing something her mind's on  
 65 something else, you know."

66 Senior "Well I haven't actually taught Carol... but I KNOW  
 67 this course and it's in units of a few weeks... It's  
 68 broken up into quite a large number of components, so  
 69 it's the kind of course which, as Mr.Cliff said, might  
 70 suit Carol, and your point about concentration..."

71 Mother [To Carol] "That's not having a go at you by the way,  
 72 that's just EXPLAINING it you know."

73 Pupil [Laughs]

74 Tutor [To Carol] "So how do YOU feel about that one?"

75 Pupil "Yeah."

76 Tutor "Yeah. You'd like to have a go at that one would you?"

77 Mother "You're sure?"

78 Pupil "Yeah."

79 Tutor "You're sure? Okay. [To Mother] 'Cause they have to do  
 80 one science and they have to do one humanities  
 81 subject."

82 Mother "Yes."

83 Tutor "Alright so I'll leave Typing out for now."

84 Mother "See I don't want her to feel that I'm against her  
85 doing it, I'M NOT."

86 Senior "NO, no. No, we've said that she can do it anyway, if  
87 she wants to come in the fifth year, so it's not as  
88 though there's no opportunity of taking Typing."

89 Tutor "Okay. Then in these two columns here, a VERY GOOD  
90 course is to do Community Studies in there [block 2]  
91 AND Community Studies in this one."

92 Mother "And what does that consist of?"

93 Tutor "Community Studies, [To the Senior] you know more  
94 about Community Studies than I do..."

95 Senior "Yes. Yes again, it's a very practical course whereby  
96 for one whole morning a week they'll go out into [the  
97 City] and they'll visit either a nursery or an old  
98 people's home (...) And that is PURELY PRACTICAL.  
99 It's good in that it enables them to forge  
100 relationships with old people, it helps them to kind  
101 of get the change from school to work... it gives them  
102 responsibility. So the extra course that Mr.Cliff is  
103 suggesting would be ENTIRELY practical, going out and  
104 working in the community. That was the whole idea  
105 behind it.  
106 Now I think that would suit -"

107 Tutor "- It's getting up and  
108 doing, rather than sitting down and talking and  
109 thinking about it. Which is what I prefer to do."

(...)

110 Senior "I think she'd get A LOT out of that."

111 Mother "She's good that way, getting on with people."

112 Senior "Yeah, helping people. (...)"

113 Mother "I think Ian [Carol's brother] did similar, he used to  
114 go out..."

115 Senior "Yeah, I think when Ian did it there was just the one  
116 subject, now it's double, DOUBLE time."

117 Mother "Yes."

118 Tutor "So they can get a lot more."

119 Mother "Yes."

120 Tutor [To Carol] "Okay? How do you feel about that? I mean  
121 you're the one who's got to do the work, and if you  
122 don't feel you want to do it, then tell us."

123 Mother "It's no good saying 'Yes' now, then..."

124 Pupil "I wanted to do Community Studies anyway."

125 Senior "Yeah."

126 Tutor "You'd got it down."

127 Mother "It's no good saying now, then when you get out saying  
128 to me, 'Oh, I didn't want to do this', [To the staff]  
129 'Cause this is how they are you know?"

130 Senior "That's right."

131 Tutor "Yeah, they come back to me the day afterwards..."

132 Mother "You've given her opportunities to say 'No', you  
133 know."

134 Senior "Yeah."

135 Tutor [To Carol] "How do you feel about that?"

136 Pupil [Nods] "Yeah."

137 Mother "You're quite happy there?"

138 Senior "Fine."

139 Tutor "Great. [To Carol] Now your last one, you've got  
140 quite a choice there, (...) you've chosen to do Child  
141 Care, any more thoughts about that?"

142 Pupil "No, I want to do Child Care."

143 Mother "She's very good at that, she's -"

144 Tutor "- Not Housecraft?"

145 Pupil "No."

146 Senior "No. Fine"

147 Tutor [To the Senior] "Okay, we'll leave that at Child Care?"

148 Senior "Well if you're happy that's probably a good choice.  
149 Again it's a more practical type course."

150 Tutor "If you like doing something you've a better chance of  
151 doing better."

(...)

[Having quickly accepted Carol's choice of 'Design' options]

152 Tutor [To Carol] "How's that then? You happy with that?"

153 Pupil [Nods] "Yeah."



154 Mother [To Carol] "It's like the teacher said, you're the one  
 155 that's got to do it."

156 Senior "That seems to me, a good, a GOOD BALANCE for Carol, I  
 157 honestly think that is. And if she remembers that if  
 158 she wants to take up the Typing in the last year, she  
 159 can."

160 Tutor "And it doesn't cost anything if she's still in  
 161 school."

162 Mother "Right. Right. ... "

163 Tutor "OKAY THEN?"

164 Mother [Stands up] "Yeah, thank you."

165 Tutor "Thanks very much for coming."

a) The pupil role

With the inclusion of parents in the official negotiation, the pupil role was significantly diminished. Whereas in the informal negotiations the staff needed to persuade the pupil, in the official meetings the arguments were directed towards the parents. The pupil's role was reduced to little more than occasionally being required to show a preference between 'possible' options or to approve the negotiated choices. This can be seen from Carol Barber's case (above), where both members of staff directed their arguments at the parent, often involving the pupil only when they required final confirmation that a choice was acceptable, eg. lines 74-78, 120-124 and 152-153. In Carol's case the only occasion when the pupil's feelings about a subject were probed before the staff offered their 'advice' concerned the low-status choice of Child Care (lines 139-141), which was accepted by the senior member of staff after the most cursory of queries by the form tutor, since the subject's status matched the official view of Carol's abilities (the following chapter further explores subject statuses in City Road).

As I have already stated, Carol was seen as one of the 'least-able' pupils and her meeting was unusual in that she was not asked about any occupational aspirations. In the majority of cases this offered the only real point of influence for pupils in these meetings. The staff would usually accept any subjects which

seemed relevant to a pupil's particular goal. The only exception to this concerned one boy's aim of being a stunt-man, which was judged to be "unrealistic". Other occupational aspirations (from bricklayer to air hostess) were always taken seriously by the staff involved in the negotiations. Indeed one of my case study pupils, Arif Aslam who was seen as being "very able", had researched the requirements of his chosen profession in so much detail that he was able to justify each of his options in relation to it. However, in Carol's case the staff's image of her ability was such that they had very clear ideas about which subjects were "best for her" (line 2).

Carol's quiet acceptance of the negotiated 'choices' was typical of almost all the pupils whom I observed in these meetings. As I have noted, Arif exercised great influence over his negotiation and in a later part of this chapter I will consider another pupil's resistance to the staff's 'advice'. In the official meetings, however, such pupils were the exception rather than the rule.

#### b) The parental role

In Carol's negotiation the parent had little influence over which optional subjects were eventually recorded. Despite her arguments (lines 37-8 and 49-51) Mrs Barber failed to save Carol's choice of Typing and the staff negotiated the acceptance of the low-status subjects which they felt appropriate. However, the frequency and nature of parental contributions in the Barber meeting was unusually high. Most parents took a far more passive role in the meetings. Despite the anxiety with which the staff approached some of the interviews, the majority of parents tended to act as 'rubber stamps', simply approving the teachers' statements and allowing the senior staff representatives to totally dominate the meeting.

In order to understand the parents' position one must appreciate the sense of unfamiliarity many of them experienced on visiting the school. City Road comprehensive was a large, physically imposing structure and, having entered the school and found the secretaries office, the parents would often have to wait

several minutes before they were met by a form tutor or directed to the meeting. If directed to a meeting by a secretary, the parents had to climb flights of stairs and walk long anonymous corridors with no further guide to the location of the room except for the numbers which remained intact on a few of the classroom doors. Parents who waited for a member of staff could stand for as long as twenty minutes (if the tutor was already seeing some parents) while various staff and pupils rushed around the foyer, none paying them any attention, and reinforcing the fact that the parents were 'strangers' to the setting.

The staff recognized the unease which most parents felt and would often begin the interviews with an 'explanation' of the meeting's purpose: for example, Cliff's opening remarks (lines 1-12). This kind of introduction allowed the parents only a limited role in the meeting by defining the 'legitimate' (ie. senior staff) criteria in relation to which the choice of subject options would be examined, ie. emphasizing the importance of 'ability' and taking for granted the right of teachers to make 'recommendations'. Consequently, in many interviews the single largest parental contribution came at the end, after the options had been decided and as the staff were closing the meeting.

Senior staff     "Are you happy with those Mrs Mitchell?"

Mother             "If she's satisfied... She's got to do 'em, so it's up to her to put the effort in."

A minority of parents did take an active part in the interviews, inasmuch as they asked questions concerning course content (eg. Carol's mother: line 92) and suggested certain subjects from which they felt their children might benefit (lines 49-51). However, even these parents rarely had any real influence over the choice of options. Many parents, like Mrs Barber, were 'out-manoeuvred' by staff 'channelling strategies' (see below) and the majority were unwilling to challenge the school's 'expertise' over subject choice. For example, the father of another of Mr Cliff's pupils (Kenny Tate) had some very definite ideas about his son's future

and constantly quizzed Cliff and the member of senior staff about particular subjects on the option pattern. However, Mr. Tate's first words during the interview effectively resigned any power in the negotiation to the members of staff:

[Before Mr Cliff could explain about the 'provisional' nature of the choices to date, Kenny's father interrupted]

Father                "I'll be honest with you, I'm not influenced either way, you're in a better position than what I am... (...) As I say, I'll be truthful with you, I'm in your particular hands in this, I'll sort of bow down to you."

In the meetings which I observed, the gender and ethnic origin of the parent involved was of little consequence, almost all deferred to the staff position eventually. However, it should be noted that in the case of two Asian pupils language created an additional barrier to parental involvement: this is examined further in the next chapter.

#### c) The staff roles: a "team performance"

This account of the staff roles in the option meetings is set within the analytical framework for the study of face-to-face interactions outlined by Erving Goffman (1959). Goffman's dramaturgical analogy helps to illuminate not only the problems which the staff faced during these negotiations but also the sources of their dominance throughout the majority of such meetings.

In Goffman's terms the two members of staff present during each official negotiation acted as a "team", ie. "a set of individuals whose intimate cooperation is required if a given projected definition of the situation is to be maintained" (Goffman, 1959: 108). In this case, the seniors and tutors applied selective criteria to their assessment of pupils' choices and, where they disagreed with the 'provisional' choices, as a team they sought to "channel" (Woods, 1979) pupils towards what they saw as 'the right' subjects. However, such channelling could not be done by diktat because, as I noted in the previous chapter, staff of all levels

felt that the pupils might suffer a loss of motivation if they were 'forced' into an unwelcome option. In addition to the motivational aspects of the system there was also something of an ideological component in that the senior staff felt that the pupils and parents should be involved in the option choices. Therefore in the official meetings the staff team were attempting to channel some pupils away from one or more of their 'provisional' choices whilst simultaneously maintaining the definition of the situation as a discussion of possible choices.

Officially the form tutor's role in these meetings was to act as an 'adviser', both to the pupil and to the member of senior staff. As I have already noted, it was assumed that of all staff members, the pupils' form tutors 'knew them best'. However, the form tutors were not independent advisers, they were required to act in coordination with a colleague and, like teachers reported elsewhere (Becker, 1953), the staff I interviewed felt that they should avoid any disagreements in front of parents. In addition, the colleague was a superior (a member of the senior staff) and the tutors felt that they had to perform well. To some extent the form tutors (like their pupils) were on trial.

A 3rd year

form tutor "Well, obviously if you're in with the Head, you're, to an extent, you're being assessed YOURSELF in a way. Your handling of a situation, the things you say, you're aware that you're not speaking in a completely neutral environment..."

This placed the tutor in a very stressful position: the tutor had to quickly identify what, if any, changes the senior was aiming at and then support them in the negotiation. Throughout this the tutor was expected to maintain their own role as 'adviser',

A 3rd year

form tutor "...you've got sort of one ear listening to the kid, one eye on what you should be doing [reading assessments as the basis for advice] and the other ear on what you THINK the management team want. Because you know they're not

actually going to say to you candidly, 'Let's stop this and have a big chat about it' - you've got to try and pick up on their SIGNALS, and try and INFER the reasons behind it. (...) And bearing in mind we don't have rehearsals or chats before hand."

The tutor's comment about the lack of a rehearsal demonstrates the strength of the dramaturgical analogy: the staff really did see themselves as "putting on a bit of show" (field notes), by trying to maintain the confidence of the pupil and parent whilst channelling the pupil into 'suitable' options.

In almost all cases the performance was successful, with the form tutors accurately reading the senior's "signals" and "inferring" the reasons behind them. This was possible because the different members of senior staff applied very similar selection criteria and viewed subjects in relation to a subject status hierarchy which was recognized (if not accepted as legitimate) by all staff in the school (4).

In almost all of the official meetings which I watched the senior member of staff directed the negotiation with the tutor playing a supporting role. By the end of their period of meetings, however, the three form tutors had become quite skilled in anticipating the senior's responses to particular choices. As one tutor put it, the seniors had "favourite tracks", and this allowed the tutors to take more active roles in the later meetings. Hence, in Carol Barber's negotiation (which was one of Mr Cliff's last) the tutor took the initiative concerning the challenge to Typing (lines 19-20) and the recommendation of Applied Science and the Double Community Studies course (lines 54-61 and 89-91). It should be noted, however, that Mr Cliff maintained his suggestions only after the senior had approved them. Indeed at one point Mr Cliff explicitly looked for confirmation from his superior (line 147).

The senior staff perspectives were not always as predictable as in Carol Barber's meeting, and where the senior introduced an unexpected element into the negotiation the form tutor was left to adjust his performance to maintain the image of a united staff (team) front. This happened to Mr Dean in an interview with Wayne Johnson and his father.

Wayne was a West Indian pupil who, despite apparent ability, was seen as

something of a "troublemaker" ("a bad 'un") by staff (field notes). Three of the seven option assessments which were written by Wayne's subject teachers complained that he was not trying hard enough and was consequently underachieving. In his 'provisional' choices Wayne had chosen three sciences, however, the senior staff in making their 'recommendations' had seen choices of more than one science as suitable only for 'able' pupils who were seen to be achieving relatively well. Hence, the negotiation opened with criticism of Wayne's attitude and soon queried the choice of so many "demanding" subjects. Reacting to the senior's suggestion that more "practical" subjects might be in order, Mr Dean suggested Applied Science (the lowest status science option). Initially the senior supported this and the 'choice' was accepted by all parties in the negotiation. Later in the meeting, however, the senior became critical of Applied Science and offered Wayne two 'mainstream' sciences (Physics and Biology), which the pupil gladly accepted. Mr Dean did not understand the sudden change in the senior's position and, although he continued to support his superior's comments, took a much less prominent role during the remainder of the meeting.

Some impression of the importance of understanding between team-mates can be gained from the fact that after Wayne and his father left the room, the senior felt the need to explain his actions to Mr Dean:

Tutor                "I've got another parent now."

Senior                "Yeah, just shut the door for a minute.  
                           [Mr Dean does so]  
                           A bit tactical there. You might of thought it was curious that I was pushing him into Physics and Biology, and that was because we've got to be careful that some of these subjects like Community Studies -  
                           [interruption]  
                           ... Yeah, one of the things that we've got to be careful about, is that the, what's called... not the SINK subjects (5), but the certain subjects like Community Studies and Applied Science, if we're not careful they just get THE DROSS and it's very, very difficult to teach. If they get too many like him [Wayne] it makes it all the more difficult. So if I seemed - "

Tutor                "No, his dad was alright, responsible, you know."

- Senior "His dad's - that's right. And he's CAPABLE of doing better. So I wasn't displeased to hear him... And if Physics complain... well TOUGH."
- Tutor [Laughing] "I was trying to steer him away..."
- Senior "I know you were, but I'm thinking of the POOR SOD who's got to teach a lot of the Wayne Johnson's in Applied Science."
- Tutor "Yeah, I do take your point, I was just acting on information [assessments] which Tony [Mr Jennings] gave me."
- Senior "Yeah, well I'll have a word with Tony, 'cause I think there's got to be a little bit of tactical play."

In Goffman's terms, the above transcript illustrates a "director" reinforcing the solidarity of the team and safeguarding future cooperation by clarifying the reasoning behind their latest performance. Once cleared of the audience (Wayne and his father), and sealed off from the outside (by closing the door), the office which was used for the meeting became a "back stage" region, where both actors could candidly discuss the show they had just given. This allowed the senior to explain that in Wayne's case his primary motives concerned social control rather than educational opportunity.

Such cooperation between the members of staff made them a formidable team, who as I have already noted, usually achieved the changes in option 'choice' which they desired.

To a great extent the dominance of the staff team lay in the interactional structure of the official meetings. The staff acted as a disciplined "team", while their audience (the pupil and parent(s)) hardly ever acted as a unit. In almost all cases the pupils resigned all responsibility to their parents, who in their turn usually deferred to the 'expert' status of the staff: a status which was enhanced by the "setting" for the meetings, ie. the physical surroundings of the school itself caused many parents to feel 'lost' in both a geographic and a metaphorical sense.

Those parents who did attempt to take an active part in the discussions were usually 'coopted' into supporting the school team and questioning their children.



For example, Mrs Barber, in her concern to help Carol, openly challenged her daughter about her true feelings (lines 123, and 127-9) in a way which did not allow for any tacit agreement over a joint performance. This placed the staff in a position of unity before a largely disorganized audience.

The staff team did not achieve its dominant influence purely through a position in the structure of the interaction. As Carol Barber's negotiation demonstrated, not all parents immediately accepted staff suggestions, no matter how many times they were repeated (lines 49-51). The strategies which the staff used in such circumstances played an important role in ensuring the staff's dominance over option choice at this stage and are considered further in the following section.

#### d) Channelling strategies

As I have noted above, for a variety of reasons the staff were unwilling to 'force' pupils into any option changes. Yet in order to serve what they saw as the pupils' best interests the staff felt compelled to advise against choices which they saw as 'incorrect'. This dilemma was particularly acute where the staff wanted to cool out a pupil by lowering their expectations, but needed to avoid any loss of motivation.

Mr Cliff

(Form tutor) "[There were] some kids who thought they could do far better than they were capable. For example, Carol Barber (...) I think we've done a good job of pointing out her capabilities without ... insulting her. With her mother there as well, it's a bit difficult to get that over without insulting or... whats the word I'm looking for... DAMAGING them, you know and knocking them down."

As this quotation shows, Cliff thought that the meetings had gone well and was particularly pleased with the result of Carol Barber's, in which the staff had brought about the changes they desired without open conflict with the pupil or parent. The changes which the staff brought about were achieved through a series of channelling strategies which were repeated in many different meetings by the various members of staff who were involved.

The most basic strategy was simply to challenge an 'incorrect' choice. For example, criticizing the usefulness of one subject whilst suggesting a replacement. In Carol Barber's meeting this can be seen in the attack on Typing, which the staff felt would "frustrate" Carol (eg. lines 22-5). An emphasis upon the "practical" nature of many low status subjects was often used as a 'selling point' in negotiations throughout the option process. For example, concerning Applied Science (lines 58-61) and later in the meeting when Community Studies was being discussed (lines 95-106).

As Carol's negotiation bears witness, a simple challenge from the staff team was not always enough to bring about the desired change. For example, Mrs Barber continued to put her point that Carol might benefit from studying a subject upon which she was so keen. This brought about the use of another strategy to finally engineer the loss of Typing: Cliff, having witnessed several negotiations by that time, used his knowledge of the option pattern and the requirements of the choice system to close the argument concerning Typing. He did this by switching his concern to Carol's science option (lines 54-61). Typing was only available in option blocks One and Two (see Figure 2.2 in the previous chapter). Once Applied Science had been accepted in the first block, with the Double Community Studies course in blocks Two and Three, Typing was no longer possible. Such a use of the option pattern, to 'close down' the number of possible choices, was a very common strategy, and, because it required a clear understanding of the options system, was one which was very often successful. Under such circumstances I saw no pupils or parents argue against what seemed to be unavoidable, and therefore legitimate, restrictions upon the choices which were 'possible'.

A further channelling strategy which can be seen in Carol Barber's meeting concerned staff appeals to "balance". I noted in the previous chapter that during the build up to the options, on occasions such as the Option Explanation Evening, the senior staff used the goal of "a balanced education" as the justification for the choice prescriptions within the option system. The senior staff felt that the

existence of the common core and the rule requiring the choice of at least one science and one humanity subject were enough to ensure a "balanced" fourth year timetable. However, in the official meetings with pupils and parents, "balance" was invoked as a factor in the choice of specific subjects. In Carol Barber's case, arguments concerning "balance" were used towards the end of the meeting as a final selling point: the senior reassured the parent that the choices represented "a GOOD BALANCE for Carol" (line 156). The seniors also used arguments about "balance" in relation to future job market requirements. Again, the interpretation of a "good balance" lay in the senior staff's perception of the pupil's 'abilities'. This can be seen in the following extracts which are taken from consecutive official meetings with two 3D pupils, both of whom had 'provisionally' chosen the Double Community Studies option.

Mr Cliff [To the parent of Peter Staley]

"If he chooses to do [Double Community Studies] (...) then in two years time - which is a way off - then he's stuck with these two lots and he's not got such a BROAD... (...) I mean with Geography [an alternative in block 2] he's got a much BROADER ... bunch of subjects there which could be more helpful."

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[Having summarized Barry Flemming's choices, including Double Community Studies]

Mr Cliff "So there's a good balance there."

Senior "What he's picked is more of a PRACTICAL course, which is probably more suitable for Barry (...) You see we try and give them a BALANCED education. It would be criminal to send them out to a specialized field."

In the earlier of the two meetings the staff team were trying to warm up a pupil whom they felt was capable of more 'demanding' subjects than the 'sink' Double Community Studies option. Hence, Mr Cliff characterized the Double course as taking up too much of the timetable and being too specialized. This was exactly the reverse of the staff's argument in the next meeting which sought to confirm Barry

Flemming's provisional choices. In this case the Double course was thought to be appropriate to Barry's abilities and was portrayed as ensuring balance by preventing early specialization.

The strategies outlined above were by no means the only ones used by staff teams during the official option meetings, but they were amongst the most common. The interactional structure of the meetings, and the complexity of the staff's strategies, give some impression of the means by which they were able to dominate the official negotiations without compromising the definition of the situation as part of a process which was concerned with pupil choice rather than selection.

e) The limitations of staff power

In all but two of the 33 official meetings which I observed the staff team acted from a relatively 'comfortable' position which allowed them to dominate the flow of the negotiation. Their authority went unchallenged and they usually brought about the changes which they required of the pupils. However, staff teams were not totally dominant. For example, one of my case study pupils, Arif Aslam, was able to control his meeting because of his superior knowledge concerning the requirements of his chosen occupation.

Arif stated that he wanted to be "a vet, or an ordinary doctor". He had 'provisionally' chosen Physics, Chemistry, Geography and Technical Graphics. Arif had discovered that he would need 'A' level passes in each of the three mainstream sciences. However, the senior staff had set a limit of two sciences at 'O' level. In view of this, Arif had decided that Biology would be the easiest to pick up after two years break. This view coincided with the senior staff's belief that Biology was somewhat less demanding than the physical sciences and, once Arif had established his superior background knowledge, the senior was content to accept the pupil's original choices.

- Senior [To the parent] "In view of what he says about being a vet and a doctor- which is good to have ambitions like this- I just wonder whether Chemistry and Biology might not be a better choice rather than -"
- Pupil "- yeah but sir I'll be doing Biology at college."  
(...)
- Senior "Yes, you CAN take Biology when you leave school, but you might find it a bit difficult if you've dropped it in years four and five."
- Pupil "Yes sir, but I'd find Physics MORE difficult (...) if I take Physics at college it'll be more difficult THERE."
- Senior "But why would you take Physics at college?"
- Pupil "Sir, you need 5 'O' levels sir. And you need -"
- Senior "- Yes, well you'll probably get 5 'O' levels."
- Pupil "Yes sir, but you need 3 sciences."
- Senior "Not necessarily I think."
- Pupil "Three in 'O' level, then you need three sciences in 'A' levels then."  
  
[Several seconds pause]
- Senior [Doubting] "You sure about that?"
- Pupil "Yes sir."
- Senior "How did you find that out?"
- Pupil "Sir I went to [the Head of Guidance]. That's what they said on the 'Signpost' cards" [ie. a careers resource].  
  
(...)
- Senior [Looking through Arif's assessments] "You obviously like science a lot don't you? Because they're very good marks."  
  
[To the parent] Basically, the top grade for both performance and effort. (...)  
  
So lets just summarize what you've found out then, you've found out that it doesn't REALLY matter which of the sciences you take at school, as long as when you've left college you have three science 'A' levels. (...) So what you're saying is that your Physics, you think you'll find it easier to do now - You would find it TOUGHER to do Physics if you laid off for two years, than say Biology?"
- Pupil "Yes Sir."

Senior [To the form tutor] "Yeah, he's probably right on that."

Arif's meeting was not the only official negotiation in which the staff's dominance was challenged. In the remainder of this section I will consider the limitations which acted upon staff power in option negotiations. In particular, I will examine the nature of the only official negotiation in which I saw the staff completely fail to bring about any change in option 'choice' despite continued pressure. The importance of this case lies in the insight it allows concerning the limitations of the staff's negotiating position and the possibilities for pupil and parental influence which existed within the option system.

The staff's unwillingness to 'force' pupils into changing their options allowed a number of pupils to resist channelling during the informal negotiations. Warming up approaches were almost always successful as the pupils seemed pleased at the praise which was inherent in suggestions such as "How about another science?", or the more overt, "You should try something a bit harder" (field notes).

A minority of attempts at cooling out were resisted as pupils met the query, "Are you sure you'll be able to cope?", with a simple, "Yes" or "I can do it". Informal negotiations were usually very hurried (typically lasting only a few minutes) and so the teacher had little time to argue his/her points (unlike the official meetings which averaged around twenty minutes). In informal negotiations this restriction upon time, plus the staff's unwillingness to force changes, usually led them to accept pupil resistance unless the channelling was based on an 'organizational' matter (such as failing to choose a humanity or science subject) which was seen as non-negotiable.

Hence, of the 23 case study pupils whom I know to have had only informal negotiations; while 17 (74%) altered at least one of their 'provisional' options, 6 pupils (26%) made no changes. It should be emphasized, therefore, that the majority of channelling attempts were successful, often a simple challenge by staff cast enough doubt on the pupil's ability to persuade them to change. However, a

significant minority of pupils did resist during informal negotiations.

Unlike the informal negotiations, an official meeting did not signify the existence of any staff challenge to one or more of the pupil's 'provisional' choices - official meetings were dependent upon a pupil's parent(s) arranging an interview. Therefore, the fact that 11 of the 38 case study pupils to have official meetings (ie. 29%) made no changes to their choices does not denote a weakened staff challenge. On the contrary, of the 33 official meetings which I observed only two seemed to upset the dominant position of the staff team. In both cases the pupils were described as "very able", consequently they were assured of a welcome in all subjects and faced no challenge concerning their ability to undertake any particular option. However, the pupils' ability was not the only significant factor in their meetings, eg. other pupils of similarly 'high ability' had official meetings and changed one or more of their choices in line with staff advice.

The two meetings stood out because of the roles which the staff's audience adopted. As I have shown above, in one meeting Arif Aslam assumed great influence through his detailed preparation and superior knowledge of the requirements of his chosen occupation. In the other exceptional meeting a female pupil (Janet Nelson) and her parents negotiated in such a way that the staff could not continue to offer their 'advice' whilst maintaining the current definition of the situation. The case is important because it demonstrates the weakness of the staff position under circumstances where the 'choice ideal' was felt to be threatened.

Janet was seen as one of the most able pupils in the school. Her form tutor, Mr Palmer, described her as "brilliant", while another teacher remarked that she was "too good for this school" (field notes). From the four option blocks Janet had "provisionally" chosen Physics, Geography, Technical Graphics (TG) and German.

The official meeting, which both Janet's parents attended, began with a lot of congratulatory remarks from the staff concerning the standard of Janet's work. Each of the academic subjects which Janet had chosen (Physics, Geography and German) was

briefly dicussed and accepted by the staff as a "good decision". The member of senior staff, however, saw TG as a "practical" subject of little status and attempted to channel Janet into a "more academic" subject. The senior began by challenging Janet to explain what she thought TG entailed. When the pupil's reply showed a good understanding of the subject the senior moved on to emphasize her potential and list some of the higher status subjects she could take in place of TG. These challenges were put in an often humorous way which helped to minimize the feeling that something of a confrontation was developing. Indeed both members of the staff team repeatedly stressed that they were only "informing" Janet, and not "forcing" her (6).

Senior      [To Mr and Mrs Nelson] "I wonder if she's gonna use her talents to the best advantage in Technical Graphics. (...) I wonder if you shouldn't be looking at more academic subjects.

[To Janet] Just a thought love, I'm not forcing you into it, nor [is] Mr Palmer, but I wonder if you ought to be thinking about it."

Janet sat quietly listening to the arguments, but did not state a preference for any other option. This led the staff to repeat their challenges and, in view of their aim of pupil participation, they continually felt the need to deny that they were "forcing" a change.

[Near the end of the interview the staff returned to the question of TG]

Tutor      [Summarizing] "So the problem at the moment is Technical Graphics then isn't it? Well if it is a problem?"

Senior      "Well it's not a problem, [To Janet] but I'd have a think about it love."

Mother      "And choose one of the other options instead?"

Senior      "Well, she ought to think about it and then make the decision - Now I don't want to go and say 'You can't do that [subject]' - "

Tutor      [To the pupil and parents] - "Don't let - [the Senior]'s not MAKING you change, some of these suggestions are just being thrown out."



The staff's desire not to compromise the notion of freedom of choice weakened their position by preventing them from openly rejecting TG. Janet's parents did not actually resist the staff's advice, indeed, I felt that had the staff openly rejected the choice Janet's parents would have supported that view, deferring to the staff's 'expert' status. Because the staff would not openly deny the choice, and continually reminded their audience that they would not do such a thing, Janet's parents attempted to clarify the staff's position and the strength of their opposition to TG. As the above transcription illustrates, this heightened the staff's dilemma and led them to pronounce that there was no "problem". This, combined with the pupil's obvious desire to take TG, led to a position where the staff could not challenge the subject any further whilst maintaining the current definition of the situation. Hence, Janet emerged from the meeting with her original choices intact.

The staff were very impressed by Janet's ability and her parents were more willing to ask questions than many who arranged meetings, yet the main factor in the staff's 'failure' in the negotiation was their own fear of "forcing" changes. By maintaining her position despite continued staff pressure, in a meeting which lasted some 40 minutes, Janet Nelson (like some pupils during informal negotiations) managed to realize the notion of freedom of choice against what the staff defined as her own 'best interests'.

### 3.3 THE FOURTH YEAR: 'Post-option' selection and renegotiation

Subject option choice is usually thought of as a 'third year' phenomenon, yet, in City Road the process continued into the fourth year as both individual pupils and teachers attempted to renegotiate certain choices. The following section offers a brief summary of the renegotiations and further highlights the differing

opportunities available to certain pupils.

a) The loss of senior staff centrality

As my research age grade began their fourth year of secondary education, I spent the first morning of term with Mr Jennings. We stood in the school's entrance foyer waiting for the 'inevitable' rush of pupils who wanted to change option choices or found that their fourth year timetable included subjects which they had not chosen.

In all Mr Jennings described it as a fairly quiet start to the term as "only" 18 pupils approached (ten were girls). Six of the pupils reported 'clerical errors' (choices which had been made during the third year but had not appeared in the official lists of each pupil's options) which were quickly rectified. Five pupils had changed their minds concerning certain choices: two of them were successful, the others were sent away to "think about it", their options were not altered.

Of the remaining seven pupils whom we saw that morning, one had misread her timetable, two had been sent by subject teachers (more about these below), and four were new to the school. The latter negotiated all their choices with Mr Jennings alone.

Mr Jennings saw the first day of term as the pupils' "last chance" to query their options and during the next few days any pupil who approached him was told to "See your teachers about it". This dissuaded many pupils who were unfamiliar with teachers and Heads of Department whom they had not been taught by during their first three years in the school. In addition pupils were often reluctant to seek out teachers during breaks in the school day (the only time available) because many staff jealously guarded this time as a chance to "get away from the kids for a while" (field notes). Pupils who 'trespassed' on such precious time could sometimes face hostile receptions.

Mr Jennings' instructions to the pupils, to "See your teachers", reflected a

real change in the roles of staff concerning access to subject options. It was at this point that the senior staff lost their position of centrality in the option process. The fourth year timetable was now in operation and there was no need to consult, or even inform, a member of senior staff about any proposed changes in a pupil's timetable. In practice, however, Jennings often found out about such changes through pupils' approaches to him and the majority of subject teachers involved seemed to inform him once the relevant departments were agreed upon a change. Hence, the balance of power over option choice shifted towards individual subject departments who now had the right to accept or reject approaches from individual pupils.

Mr Jennings      "I don't know how many's in each group now. I can't say to [departments], 'You've GOT to take this kid'. I'm having to tell them to go to the subject teachers and they're sorting it out."

During the first term of their fourth year many of my case study pupils made some informal attempt at renegotiation. I did not systematically interview all pupils about this, but almost all those whom I spoke with informally had speculated about the possibility of change with a member of staff, ie. their form tutor, Mr Jennings or a subject teacher. In almost all cases the pupils' enquiries seemed to have been very tentative and they had quickly given up the idea of change, usually after being told "It's too late" (field notes).

In contrast, ten of the pupils in my three case study forms (three of them girls) did change at least one of their two year optional courses during the first term of their fourth year (7). This is not a large number but a consideration of their experiences does highlight something of the processes at work during that stage of the City Road options system. Hence, the following sections are based upon the experiences of these ten pupils and the observations and interviews which I carried out with Mr Jennings, pupils and form tutors during the first term of the fourth year. Later into the year no further changes were made because of the

structure of the two year courses which led to the external examinations in the fifth year. Subject teachers felt that after the first term of the fourth year the courses were too advanced for newcomers to easily make up for lost work.

b) Successful renegotiation by pupils

Six members of my case study forms (five of them males) successfully renegotiated a change to their options during the fourth year. A basic requirement for a successful renegotiation by pupils was perseverance. They had to move between at least two subject departments searching out members of staff who could give them a decision.

If the pupil was seen as 'able' they had a much better chance of a successful renegotiation. Possessing 'ability' in the eyes of staff meant that the department which the pupil wished to join was prepared to accept them. Faced with a willing recipient department, the 'current' option, fearful of a loss of motivation, had little alternative but to allow the pupil to move.

If a pupil was both 'able' and persistent enough there seemed no limit to what they could achieve. For example, in his 'official' meeting, Parminder Bhogal had been channelled away from Computer Studies. The senior had convinced Parminder's father of the benefits of a more 'academic' subject (Geography). By 'choosing' a second humanity in option block 2, Parminder was forced to move history into the third timetable space. However, Parminder was unhappy and felt that his choices had been dictated to him.

Parminder	"I wanted to do history 'O' level right [timetabled separately in block 2], I wanted to do Computer Studies as well, but they wouldn't let me do Computer Studies so I had to change them over."
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At the beginning of the fourth year Parminder's options were listed as Physics, Geography, History and Technical Graphics. Staff perceptions of Parminder's ability were favourable, hence both History and Computer Studies would allow him access. By

approaching individual departments he was able to move into the History 'O' level group in block 2 (in place of Geography), switch his TG from block 4 to 3, and enter Computer Studies in the final timetable slot. Such a complex move demanded not only perseverance and ability in the eyes of staff, but also an understanding of the workings of the option pattern which related directly to the fourth year timetable. The pupil recognized that his success depended upon both his knowledge of the options organization and sheer determination.

Parminder "I've got THE SYSTEM, I carried on trying, thats why I got [Computer Studies]. (...)

[Mr Jennings] wasn't very helpful (...) he could have come with me to the teachers in the subjects, could have given me a letter or something, instead of just saying 'Go and ask the teacher.'"

Unless a pupil was seen as 'able', he or she had little chance of successfully renegotiating any of their two year optional courses once the fourth year was under way. Without the support of the departments involved a renegotiation was impossible. Therefore subject departments gained in influence during this stage of the process. Indeed their influence was not confined to merely passing judgment on pupils' own requests.

#### c) Successful renegotiation by subject departments

Subject departments were able to take advantage of the reduced senior staff role and exercise some selection over the composition of their teaching groups. Their scope was, however, very limited. Departments had no access to 'able' pupils who had not chosen their subject. Therefore, unless an 'able' pupil approached the department with a transfer request, their only scope for change concerned those pupils who had chosen that subject but were judged unsuitable.

The senior staff were aware of this and, if they found out about such moves, would challenge departments whom they felt were "getting rid of problem kids" without due regard for the pupils' best interests (field notes). As a result it was

only in exceptional cases that departments encouraged pupils to change. In my case study forms four pupils were moved in this way; two girls moved between craft subjects within a faculty while post-option negotiations led two boys (Rafiq Ali and Simon Bains - both of 3A) to move into the Double Community Studies option, ie. a course specifically designed for the 'least able' pupils. It was these two pupils' option changes which caused most discussion between their form tutor, the subject teachers and Mr Jennings.

Both Rafiq and Simon had chosen Religious Education (RE) as a two year option. Although each pupils' departmental assessments had specifically stated that neither was capable of the fourth year course, because RE was not accorded as much status by senior staff as the other 'mainstream' humanities of Geography and History, the choices had not been challenged. The pupils' behaviour in lessons was as much a factor in the departmental renegotiation as their lack of 'ability', eg. one of their form mates, Darren Priest, was seen as equally "hopeless" in academic terms yet his choices were not challenged or renegotiated. In contrast, Rafiq and Simon were widely known as "chatter-boxes" and "troublemakers" (field notes).

Both pupils were approached by subject teachers and in interviews they told me that they were happy to follow the "advice" which they had been given. The Head of Religious Education had some involvement in Community Studies and by emphasizing the links between the subjects she was able to satisfy the senior staff about the 'legitimacy' of the moves.

A member of

Senior staff "I don't think there's been too much manoeuvring there [Simon's case] because the teacher who wanted to move him takes Community Studies as well". (field notes)

Although such post-option selection by departments was restricted to the 'least-able' and most 'troublesome' pupils it was significant in completing the cooling out of pupils like Rafiq and Simon who had met staff rejection at each stage of the options process and had finally 'sunk' into the lowest status curricula level

in the school.

The experiences of my case study pupils would seem to indicate that the renegotiation of subject options during the first term of the fourth year had most consequence for a few pupils who were at either end of the perceived scale of 'ability' and 'attitude' in the school. Pupils who were seen as 'able' and were prepared to show effort in approaching individual teachers could gain acceptance, even to some of the most selective subjects. Alternatively, those pupils whom departments felt were incapable of academic work, and might threaten the order of the teaching group, could be channelled into low status 'sink' subjects, if the senior staff were convinced of the legitimacy of the department's objectives.

## CONCLUSION

Following on from the previous chapter's analysis of the responsibilities and perspectives of the senior staff, subject teachers, form tutors and pupils, in this chapter I have presented an account of the roles and strategies adopted by the participants involved in the face-to-face negotiation of subject choice in City Road. I have used the detailed analysis of one official meeting as the starting point for a wider consideration of the other official and informal option negotiations which I witnessed.

During all but two of the 33 official meetings which I observed the staff members acted a unified "team" whose "performance" usually secured the desired changes in subject options. The staff's power over option choice lay in their position as actors who knew the requirements of the system and lay claim to a more complete view of the pupils' interests: they were 'experts' to whose opinion most parents deferred.

The staff's influence was great, but not total. The option choice organization was founded upon the principle that parents and the pupils themselves should have

some say in their education. While the staff team hoped to 'persuade' their audience of the wisdom of their advice, they would not 'force' changes in the pupils' provisional choices. This limited the staff's power to repeatedly challenge any choice and, in a minority of cases, pupils were able to maintain their original choices despite staff challenges.

Subject option decisions are commonly thought of as a third year phenomenon. The choices are finalized before the pupils' fourth year in order that the last two years of their compulsory education may be spent studying the courses which will lead to external examinations at 16-plus. Ten of my case study pupils, however, experienced changes to their optional subjects during the first term of their fourth year. The small number of pupils involved in such renegotiations makes generalization dangerous but it was interesting to note that the changes may have evidenced a small increase in the influence of subject departments at that late stage in the options process. Also, the case study pupils who were involved reflected either end of the perceived scale of pupil 'ability' and 'attitude' in the school. Hence, some 'able' pupils moved into subjects which they preferred to their listed options, while some of their 'least able' and 'troublesome' peers entered the subjects of least status on the upper school timetable.

The experiences of these pupils reflected an element of selection which ran throughout the options process but which I have not fully explored so far in this analysis. This is the subject of the next chapter which considers the 'patterns' of option negotiation which were sometimes experienced by pupils of particular social 'identities'. In so doing I wish to draw comparisons between the findings of this and previous studies of option choice.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. In terms of pupil gender, my case study pupils' third year option negotiations broke down as follows;

3 boys and 4 girls experienced no further negotiation after



handing in their 'provisional' choices.

Of the 38 pupils whose parents attended official meetings, 20 pupils were male and 18 were female.

Of the 23 pupils who had no official meeting but who were seen 'informally', 19 were male and 4 were female.

2. Although the Head of Guidance was not a member of senior staff, he was closely involved with Mr Jennings in the open coaching (which I described in the previous chapter) and shared the seniors' perceptions of the appropriate choice criteria. This was reflected in the fact that he was charged with the 'senior staff' role in negotiations when other seniors were not available.
3. The members of senior staff who took part in the official meetings were generally very consistent in the kinds of selection criteria and channelling strategies which they used. Therefore there is no need to distinguish between individual members of the senior staff in certain interview and observational transcripts. In addition this may further protect against the identification of individuals within the setting.
4. I noted the existence of this status hierarchy in the previous chapter when considering the distinctions between 'academic' and 'practical' subjects in relation to the option pattern. Further analysis of the differences in subject status also appears in the next chapter.
5. The term 'sink' is often applied to subjects which are aimed at, or come to be reserved for, the least able pupils (eg. Ball, 1981: 134). As this transcription demonstrates, in City Road the senior teachers consciously tried to avoid using the term (with varying degrees of success), although it accurately described the status of two courses in the school. These were Applied Science and the Double Community Studies option (both CSE mode III examinations). The former was also a 'Limited Grade' course in which no pupil could attain higher than a grade 3 CSE pass.
6. The senior's use of terms of familiarity, such as "dear" and "love", was something which I heard in no other meeting. Although such words may appear patronizing when presented as a transcript, in the context of the meeting, they helped to maintain an informal atmosphere and lessened the sense of confrontation.
7. Some pupils changed one or more of the three craft subjects for which they were officially listed within the compulsory design course. Such changes were often the result of administrative problems within the faculty (caused by the loss of the senior member) and in no way altered the status of the CSE examination which pupils received at the end of the course. Throughout this work, therefore, I have concentrated upon the four separate two-year optional subjects which pupils negotiated, rather than the three craft courses which together made up a single compulsory design option in the school.

## CHAPTER 4: PATTERNS OF SELECTION

### Pupil 'identities' and the negotiation of subject options

#### 4.1 'ACADEMIC' SELECTION AND THE SUBJECT OPTION PROCESS

- a) Previous work on subject status and option choice
- b) Subject status and option choice in City Road Comprehensive
  - i. Subject status in City Road  
The "demanding, academic" and the "less demanding,  
practical"  
The 'mainstream' sciences  
The 'mainstream' humanities  
Computer Studies
  - ii. Levels of curriculum placement: The distribution of  
academic and non-academic curricula in the upper school
  - iii. Pupil choice and staff channelling

#### 4.2 PUPIL GENDER AND THE SUBJECT OPTION PROCESS

- a) Pupil gender and patterns of subject specialization
- b) The processes of subject specialization by gender

#### 4.3 ETHNIC ORIGIN AND THE SUBJECT OPTION PROCESS

- a) Previous work on ethnic origin and subject choice
- b) Ethnic origin and experience of the City Road options system
  - i. Language and the participation of Asian parents
  - ii. West Indian pupils and 'spontaneous' staff challenges

## CONCLUSION AND NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

## CHAPTER 4: PATTERNS OF SELECTION

### Pupil 'identities' and the negotiation of subject options

"During my two year association with the school no other event struck me as being more important, more conflictual, more cataclysmic for the people involved than the process of subject choice. Also no other was more revealing, both in terms of the school's relationship with wider society, and in terms of individual teachers' actions and decisions."

Peter Woods (1977: 30)

Woods' sentiments concerning events which he studied in a Secondary Modern school hold true for the processes which I observed in City Road Comprehensive a decade later. "The options" was an important time for staff, as well as pupils. The status of subject departments and teachers could be affected and the decisions concerning access to certain subjects had consequences for the rest of the pupils' compulsory education. Indeed, these decisions could have influence beyond the school and into post-school educational and occupational markets.

In City Road the options process was particularly revealing because it represented the most crucial point of selection during the pupils' educational careers to that date. The options threw into relief some of the perspectives and routine assumptions which shaped educational opportunity in the school more generally.

The previous chapters have described the organization, preparation and negotiation of subject option choices, examining the perspectives and face-to-face interactions which made up the 'choice' process in City Road. This chapter 'stands back' a little from the interactional roles of various participants and focuses upon the broader patterns of experience which could be discerned during the process as a whole. In particular I wish to examine the importance of certain pupil identities which could have consequences for the negotiation of access to individual subjects during the choice process. By 'identities' I refer to certain characteristics (either ascribed or achieved) which may influence how an individual is perceived by others (after Goffman, 1963).

In turn I will consider the influence of 'ability', gender and ethnic origin as elements of a pupil's identity which could have consequences for their experience of the choice process. In each case I shall consider the available evidence from previous work on subject specialization and examine what, if anything, the current study of City Road can add to our understanding of the processes involved. In so doing I am of course simplifying the situation within the school. No two pupils experienced the options in exactly the same way, however, certain common features may be identified.

#### 4.1 'ACADEMIC' SELECTION AND THE SUBJECT OPTION PROCESS

Several studies have focussed upon subject option decisions as a key point in the development of pupil careers. One of the first serious examinations of option systems was published by the National Foundation for Educational Research (Reid et al, 1974) and in recent years the question of subject specialization has attracted work which aimed not only at understanding, but also at changing, the ways in which option decisions are taken, eg. the action research of the "Girls Into Science and Technology" team reported by Kelly, Whyte and Smail (1984).

Some of the most important work on option choice has applied an ethnographic approach (eg. Woods, 1976, 1977 and 1979; Hurman, 1978; Ball, 1981). In each of these accounts the pupils had already been subject to "streaming", "setting" or "banding" for the majority of lessons during their third year. In Woods' "Lowfield" Secondary Modern School the "disguised streaming" of the 1st and 2nd years was "made manifest in the 3rd year on the basis of a pupils' ability in English (leading to the) graded forms, 3A, 3B and 3C..." (Woods, 1979: 6). Ann Hurman noted that the third year pupils of "Victoria Comprehensive School ... were divided for most teaching purposes into three ability bands, a 'top' and a 'middle' band with two parallel classes in each and a remedial Band in which one class was of higher

ability than the other" (Hurman, 1978: 46). The history of "West Mercia High", the second school studied in Hurman's book, was quite complex, but there too "the three bands began to be seen by parents and by some teachers and pupils as three separate ability bands: top, middle and bottom" (Hurman, 1978: 58). Stephen Ball described the processes of change which led to the introduction of mixed-ability teaching in "Beachside Comprehensive" but the main sample of pupils whom he followed through the options process were banded by ability on entering the school (Ball, 1981: 23).

Therefore in each of these schools, in the majority of third year lessons, the pupils had been grouped by some measure or perception of their 'ability'. The researchers found that the pupils' optional subjects often reflected their position within the academic hierarchy; as represented by overt "streaming" (Woods, 1979) or the broader "banding" of pupils (Ball, 1981). The pupils whom the staff saw as being the most able tended to study 'academic' subjects of high status, whilst their 'less-able' and/or more 'troublesome' peers were concentrated in the lower status, non-academic subjects.

In this section I wish to examine the extent to which, during the options process, pupils in City Road faced selection criteria which related to staff perceptions of their 'ability'. In particular I am interested in the consequences of such perspectives for the pupils' access to subjects of differing academic statuses. As I have already noted, in contrast to most other schools which have been studied, in City Road the majority of subjects were taught in mixed ability groups throughout the first three years of secondary education. This provides an interesting comparison between City Road and the earlier studies where teachers and pupils could use 'stream' and 'band identities' as broad indicators of 'ability'.

Before examining the experiences of pupils in City Road I will briefly consider the conceptions of subject status and their consequences for option choice which have emerged in previous studies.

a) Previous work on subject status and option choice

Subjects which are typically characterized as 'academic' often had an established place in the early public and Grammar school curricula (Goodson, 1983: 16), they emphasize 'bookish' learning and remain closely related to university entrance requirements. In contrast, the more 'modern', 'vocational' or 'practical' craft subjects usually carry less exchange value in the post-school education and job markets. Many of these subjects have come to be seen as particularly suited to the needs of the less-able child, which in turn has further depressed their academic status (Hurman, 1978: 32-4; Ball, 1981: 138).

Beliefs about a relationship between 'ability' and the appropriateness of certain types of subject underlay the distinctions within the original 'tripartite' system of state maintained secondary education in this country. This was seen most clearly in the different emphases of the Grammar and Secondary Modern schools which, because of the relatively small number of Technical schools, effectively created a 'bipartite' system in many areas (Reid, 1978: 115; Hurman, 1978: 29). The system, which developed following the 1944 Education Act, embodied the notion that there were different 'types' of pupil; the academically gifted, for whom the Grammar school was most appropriate, and in the Secondary Modern schools those who, in the words of the Norwood report of 1943, "deal more easily with concrete things than ideas" (Cox, 1979: 119). Although the different schools were officially of equal merit, in practice the Grammar schools, which groomed some of their pupils for university entrance, attained the highest status. The Secondary Modern schools' pupil populations were made up of those who had failed the 11-plus examination and could not gain entrance to Grammar school, hence, they were accorded lower academic status.

During the 1960s there was increased public concern that the early selection of pupils at 11-plus (a selection which by definition condemned the majority of pupils to 'failure') was depressing the attainment of pupils who did not gain access to Grammar schools. The accusations of "wastage of ability" and social injustice

ultimately led to the reform of the system which began in the 1960s and resulted in the introduction of CSE examinations in 1963 (Evetts, 1973: 69; Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980: 28-9).

Although 87% of pupils in maintained secondary schools now attend comprehensives (Central Statistical Office, 1987: 57) arguments about selection which is too early and/or too final continue. In response to the associations between perceived 'ability' and access to high status 'academic' options some writers have recently likened the processes of selection, which begin on entry to some comprehensives (eg. banding and setting) and crystallize in the options decisions, to the more overt selection practised at 11-plus in the previous 'tripartite' system. One of the most important studies to reach such a conclusion is that by Stephen Ball (1978 and 1981).

In many ways my study of City Road shares certain of Ball's key interests and in some respects takes over where his study of Beachside comprehensive finished. For example, Ball's study is primarily concerned with banded cohorts in Beachside, his work with mixed ability groups beyond their second year was limited (Ball, 1981: 239-40). My study concerns pupils who had been taught in mixed ability groups in the majority of lessons throughout their first three years, and focused upon their experiences during the third, fourth and fifth years. In view of the complementary nature of the studies I will use Stephen Ball's analysis of Beachside as an introduction to some of the main issues and problems which I wish to address in this section.

The following extracts from Ball's study neatly summarize the status distinctions within Beachside in terms of individual subjects and their (status related) characteristics.

"In conventional terms, the traditional O-level subjects - Maths, English, the Languages, Sciences, History, Geography, etc. - are all high-status, with high exchange-value in the education and occupation markets. These are now joined by one or two newer subjects like Sociology, Economics and Geology, which, although they lack a

tradition of high status, are accepted for university entrance. (...)

Next in status come the other O-levels, the practical subjects, which are not purely academic (...) Included here are Home Economics, Needlecraft, Technical Studies, Design Drawing, Metalwork and Technical Drawing. These are subjects operating with a lower level of theoretical sophistication, but maintained at a high level of performance.

In the case of the CSE's, a pass at other than Grade 1 will not for the most part suffice as a qualification for higher education (...) But it is also necessary to differentiate between the status of the traditional CSE subjects and the 'new' Mode III CSEs. The new CSEs are probably of lowest status (...) Human Studies, Home Studies and Modern Applications of the Sciences are concerned with knowledge of everyday life, with enactive knowledge. The nominal line which divides school knowledge from the world of everyday life is here almost indistinguishable."

Stephen Ball (1981: 139-40)

As this quotation demonstrates, subject status is synonymous with judgements of 'value'. Firstly, high status subjects have "exchange-value". Their worth in the competition for places in the higher reaches of the educational system is most influential. Hence, although 'newer' subjects are generally treated with some suspicion by many employers and institutions of higher education, some have established a significant degree of academic status through their acceptability towards university entrance requirements.

Secondly, 'academic' subjects gain in 'value' through the greater status accorded mental rather than manual labour in our society (Woods, 1983: 70). 'Practical' subjects are generally interpreted as best suiting those pupils who do not deal well with the demands of theoretical analyses (1). Hence, Ball states that lower status subjects, such as Home Economics, lack the "theoretical sophistication" of the academic ones. This is not to say that low status subjects lack any theoretical component or that high status ones are devoid of 'practical' elements. For example, there is theory involved in learning about food contents and nutrition in Home Economics, just as there is a practical skill involved in achieving a diffraction of white light so as to expose the visible spectrum in a Physics lesson. Yet the skill involved in the latter operation is generally held in greater respect than the theory of the former. This distinction relates to what Ball identifies as



the "nominal line which divides school knowledge from the world of everyday life..." (Ball, 1981: 140). Subjects which cannot easily separate themselves from the realm of the taken-for-granted knowledge of everyday life cannot easily establish themselves as 'academic'.

Ball also noted a distinction between types of examination. The GCE is held in higher esteem than the CSE. The CSE mode I, designed and examined by actors who are external to individual schools, is greater in prestige than the CSE mode III which is designed and examined within the school itself (2). Once again the status distinctions are rooted in the examinations' exchange value: many employers are generally suspicious of 'new' examinations which are felt to lack the rigour of the more established GCE 'O' levels (a problem already facing the newly introduced GCSE examinations: Nash, 1987). Further evidence of this view was recently found in research which drew upon questionnaire and interview data concerning 494 employers.

"Many users of public examinations appear singularly ill-informed. They do not know, or are unconvinced by, explanations of the relationship between GCE O level and CSE. They do not know, or are doubtful of, efforts to ensure continuity of examination standards over time and between boards. They do not know or are unwilling to consider that Mode III has any validity (...)

Where value is attributed, it is to those (GCE) examinations which could clearly be traced back to their familiar and 'respectable' School Certificate origins. Any hint of newness, albeit of some 20 years' standing in the case of the CSE examination, generates doubts of fairly fundamental proportions."

Brian Goacher (1984: 64)

Therefore, the subject statuses which Ball outlined were ones which were acknowledged in the wider society (by universities and certain employers) and within Beachside Comprehensive (by the teachers involved in the options process). The Senior master played a central role in the Beachside options and the subject departments had the opportunity to query any choices of subject and examination level which they did not feel "appropriate" for the individual pupil (Ball, 1981: 126-8).

During the option negotiations in Beachside, a clear notion emerged concerning

the "appropriate" choices for pupils in the different ability bands.

"This notion can be expressed roughly as O-level for band 1, traditional Mode I CSEs for band 2, and new Mode III CSEs for band 3."

Stephen Ball (1981: 128)

Hence, in Beachside comprehensive the "pure" subjects of traditionally high status were "not normally available to the band 2 or 3 pupil" (Ball, 1981: 138). After Michael Young (1971b) Ball argues that this "option allocation" created a "stratified" curriculum in the upper school which institutionalized the differences between the bands and placed the pupils in very different positions when entering the post-school education and job markets.

"... despite the notions of equality of opportunity that have been attached to the reorganization to comprehensive education, the internal organization of the schools may still allow the maintenance of a system of early selection and separate provision of curriculum, that is essentially similar to that of tripartitism and sponsorship."

Stephen Ball (1981: 152)

A similar conclusion was reached by Iain Smith and Dave Woodhouse (1982; 1983; 1984) who, using standardized tests, questionnaires and interviews, studied the option systems in four 11 to 18 mixed comprehensives.

"One of the major criticisms of the tripartite educational system was that, although the selective process between secondary modern school and grammar school was known to have some inaccuracy, there were much lower levels of reallocation than would have been needed to rectify the inaccuracies. The selection was inaccurate but the consequences appear permanent. We appear to be observing a similar phenomenon within the strata of the comprehensive school (...) stratification at the earliest stages of the comprehensive school affects future educational destinations with a considerable degree of finality."

Iain Smith & Dave Woodhouse (1983: 17)

Like Ball, Smith and Woodhouse emphasize the importance of selection during the first three years of secondary education. They argue that such selection (whether

through banding or setting) bestows particular labels concerning the pupils' 'abilities' which then act to restrict their access to certain subjects during the option negotiations. In a section of their final report to the studied schools entitled "The process of the options" the authors draw upon interview data and speak of the "two-fold nature of the options process" (Smith and Woodhouse, 1983: 56). This phrase refers to the action of both pupils and teachers as decision-makers who weigh up matters of 'ability' in making/accepting particular choices. In so doing, the authors claim, both pupils and teachers use band and set positions as "cues" to ability.

In summarizing their findings Smith and Woodhouse place very great emphasis upon the importance of selection in the lower school.

"We therefore conclude that setting and banding in the first three years have very strong and autonomous effects in deciding pupils' curriculum in the later years of schooling. They appear to be the dominant cues whereby teachers make judgements about pupils and whereby pupils make judgements about themselves."

Smith and Woodhouse (1982: 47)

Smith and Woodhouse based their conclusions upon a largely quantitative analysis which sought to isolate the influence of different factors upon the subjects which pupils eventually studied in the fourth year. Their findings were generated by a statistical approach which compared pupils' fourth year options to "some measure or measure[s] of banding or setting, depending on the school" (Smith and Woodhouse, 1982: 8). However, there was very great variation between the schools in the extent and nature of the selection that was practised during the first three years; a fact which is often lost in their generalization across the four schools. For example, they state that "considerable differentiation by ability takes place in all four schools from an early age..." (Smith and Woodhouse, 1983: 43) yet on the same page they reveal that in two of their schools (Schools 'B' and 'C') only two and three subjects respectively introduced setting at any time during the first three years. By contrast Schools 'A' and 'D' banded pupils on entry. For

Smith and Woodhouse these are differences of degree only, they state that teachers and pupils across all four schools used band and set identities as "cues" to pupil ability.

Smith and Woodhouse's findings are of interest therefore because they indicate that a fundamental change, and indeed a genuine reduction, in the amount of selection practiced in the first three years has little or no effect in relation to the subsequent limitation of option choice. Whether banded or set, Smith and Woodhouse see selection in the pre-option years as leading pupils towards largely predetermined levels of high and low status curricula.

As I have stated above, Smith and Woodhouse used large scale statistical techniques in the analysis of pupils who experienced very different forms of selection during their first three years of secondary education. It may be that, as they argue, the differences between the schools were of degree not type, ie. that the introduction of setting in two subjects in School 'B' and three subjects in School 'C' represented "considerable differentiation of the curriculum by ability..." (Smith and Woodhouse, 1983: 43). However, such a view may seriously oversimplify the processes at work in these schools. For example, can we assume that banding across the entire curriculum is essentially the same as setting in two or three subjects? The overall patterns of option 'choice' may be similar but the processes behind them cannot be assumed to be the same. In fact Smith and Woodhouse do not go as far in their analysis as Stephen Ball, to whose work they refer.

In his study of Beachside comprehensive, in addition to the banded forms, Ball also followed pupils in the first years of mixed ability teaching in the school and went on to make tentative comparisons between their experiences and those of the banded cohorts which had gone before. Despite the change to mixed ability teaching in the school, three Beachside departments (Mathematics, Science and French) introduced setting during the second and third years (Ball, 1981: 268). Ball acknowledges this but describes the lower school experiences of these pupils as

essentially being of mixed ability teaching. Therefore Ball considered the distinction between banding and the limited experience of setting to be a significant one.

Ball collected full data on the options experiences of only one mixed ability form (3DY) and acknowledged that as the first mixed ability cohort in the school their experiences must be viewed with caution (Ball, 1981: 279). Ball's findings are of interest because they represent the most detailed presentation of option choice for pupils who have been taught in mixed ability groups for the majority of their first three years in the school. He shows a sensitivity to the processes of negotiation which is lacking in Smith and Woodhouse's approach.

Ball found that, in comparison to the banded pupils, the ones taught in mixed ability forms tended to require less redirection towards what the staff considered to be 'appropriate' choices. Of the band 1 forms which he studied 5.6% of 'O' level choices were rejected, for the band 2 forms the figure was 32.14%: for the mixed ability form 3DY 6.2% of 'O' level choices were rejected (Ball, 1981: 277). These figures compare the rejections within one mixed ability form to those of pupils in eight banded ones (four forms each in bands 1 and 2: Ball, 1981: 23) and so must be treated with caution. However, Ball felt that 3DY were representative of their cohort and interpreted their experiences of the options as evidence that mixed ability environments had acted to depress many pupils' expectations by constantly reminding them of the higher abilities of some of their peers.

"From these figures, then, it appears that the mixed-ability situation, compared with banding, provides a much more 'effective' basis for the socialization of appropriate aspirations for this important choice point. To a great extent it also provides a solution to the warming-up/cooling-out problems evident in the banded system. It is certainly possible that the continuous comparison between peers in the mixed-ability classroom, and the change in the distribution of success roles that mixed-ability grouping brings about, are responsible for producing these more 'realistic' choices."

Stephen Ball (1981: 278)

The existing work on option choice which was carried out within largely mixed

ability environments should, therefore, be viewed as exploratory. The studies by Ball (1981) and Smith and Woodhouse (1982; 1983; 1984) include data on such options processes yet in each case the conclusions must be viewed with caution. Ball explicitly acknowledges the tentative nature of his conclusions and recognizes that his work on the mixed ability options choices lacked some of the rigour of his analysis of the process which involved the banded forms (Ball, 1981: 277). Smith and Woodhouse studied schools which could have been used to compare the experiences of pupils taught in banded and mixed ability environments but unfortunately their methodological approach was not sensitive to the variation in the schools' grouping procedures.

The previous work on mixed ability grouping and option processes is, therefore, somewhat inconclusive. However, there are some interesting similarities between the works in that they both attribute an important role to pupil choice. Smith and Woodhouse noted "the two-fold nature of the options process", while Ball emphasized the reduced role of teachers as redirectors for mixed ability-taught pupils, whom he argued made more 'realistic' choices than the earlier banded cohorts. These similarities set the scene for the following analysis of the relations between pupils' 'ability' in the eye's of staff, and their eventual access to optional subjects of different academic status in City Road.

#### b) Subject status and option choice in City Road Comprehensive

This section considers the influences which sometimes led pupils, from the same mixed ability forms, into fourth and fifth year curricula of very different academic statuses: differences which could be of real significance in the post-school education and job markets.

I begin this section by outlining the status of the optional subjects in City Road. These differences are then applied to the fourth year timetables of the pupils in the research age grade to give some impression of the very great variation

within the upper school curriculum. Sections on pupil and staff perspectives concerning notions of 'ability' and subject status then indicate something of the influences behind these variations. As I have already noted, only three subject areas 'set by ability' during the first three years of secondary education in City Road; Mathematics, Modern Languages and Science (during the third year eight science sets rotated between Physics, Chemistry and Biology). Therefore the pupils had experienced levels of setting similar to those of Stephen Ball's mixed ability form 3DY (Ball, 1981).

#### i. Subject status in City Road

I have shown how Stephen Ball (1981) highlighted the differences in subject status in Beachside Comprehensive by reference to a number of criteria. In addition to the exchange value of subjects, in competition for places in higher education and the post-school job market, Ball also noted differences in the theoretical nature of the subjects and drew upon the views of the teachers active in the option negotiations, for example, the Senior master, Careers master and subject teachers. Ball used these sources to highlight the differing statuses of certain types of subject ('academic' and 'practical') and public examination (GCE, CSE mode I and CSE mode III). In City Road a very similar range of subject statuses existed.

The range of subject status in City Road was one which, although privately disputed by some teachers as being misguided and unjust, was generally recognized throughout the school's staff. That is to say that teaching staff were aware of the relative statuses of different subjects in the eyes of senior staff without necessarily agreeing that those statuses were a 'fair' reflection of the subjects' worth.

The differing subject statuses reflected the influence of a number of factors upon the perspectives of the senior staff. Of most importance were the senior staffs' beliefs about the academic 'character' of different subject disciplines and the demands of higher education and certain post-school job markets. The seniors'

views concerning past take-up rates and the 'history' of particular departments within the school also played some part.

The "demanding, academic" and the "less demanding, practical"

During the City Road option process the dominant assessment of each subject's academic status was that derived from the senior staff. As I have already shown, subject teachers had relatively little opportunity to influence the majority of pupils' choices. Similarly, the form tutors usually acted in tandem with the senior staff; as part of a staff 'team' in official negotiations and as a 'mouthpiece' in many informal negotiations where they presented senior staff 'recommendations' to their tutees. In the following sections I will draw the majority of my examples from official negotiations (which were more fully observed and always tape recorded). However, the status distinctions which were presented to pupils and parents were much the same regardless of the formal/informal character of the negotiation. The only exceptions concerned examples of coaching by members of subject departments (see Chapter 2).

In terms of the 'advice' offered by senior staff during the 33 official option meetings which I observed in City Road, the most basic distinction which emerged in the teachers' language concerned a distinction between subjects which were described as "demanding", "academic" (which were seen as suited to able pupils) and the "less demanding", "practical" options (which they presented as most appropriate for less able pupils). The consistency with which particular options were described in these terms was very striking. During the official negotiations which I observed, no subject was described as "academic" or "demanding" at one meeting and as "not very demanding" or "not academic enough" at another one. This contrasted with the use of the concept of "a balanced education" which, as I noted in the previous chapter, could approve a subject for one pupil but challenge its relevance for another.

During the 33 official negotiations which I observed the subjects which were most frequently described as "demanding" and/or "academic" were the 'mainstream'



sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Biology) and humanities (History, Geography, RE).

Alternatively, craft-based subjects and the low status humanity and science options (Community Studies and Applied Science) were most frequently referred to in terms of their "practical" nature.

Within this broad classification of academic/non-academic subjects certain more subtle differences and ambiguities were acknowledged. I will discuss these points later in this section after considering in more detail the fundamental dichotomy which senior staff drew between the academic and non-academic subjects.

In the previous chapter I have already paid considerable attention to the consequences of senior staff judgements of the academic nature of different subjects during the City Road options negotiations. For example, I considered how the supposedly "practical" nature of some subjects was used to 'sell' certain options to the 'less able' pupils. Carol Barber's official option meeting was a clear example of this. Alternatively, the attempts to warm-up Janet Nelson showed the senior staff's desire to channel 'able' pupils into subjects which they considered to be of an "academic" character. In that case, a very able pupil had chosen Technical Graphics (which was seen as a practical subject): in Janet's official meeting the member of senior staff and form tutor repeatedly tried to make her reconsider. In particular, Janet was encouraged to look "at more academic subjects" (senior teacher). After the meeting I spoke with her form tutor, himself a teacher of a craft subject within the same faculty as TG, who told me that Janet was "wasting her time doing Technical Graphics. She should be taking another science" (field notes).

The staff who were primarily involved in the negotiation of option choice in City Road (senior staff and form tutors) saw craft-based subjects which were located within the Craft, Design and Technology (CDT) faculty as being of a largely "practical" nature. As I have already noted, each pupil was required to follow a compulsory "Design" course made up of a selection of these subjects. However, when considering the separate two year examination courses, such subjects were seen as

most suited to the less able pupils who had difficulty with more abstract theorizing. Hence, two year examination courses in subjects such as Art, Metalwork, Woodwork, Technical Graphics, Home Economics and Textiles were judged to be a waste for 'able' pupils: a perspective which the tutors maintained regardless of their own subject specialisms, eg. Janet Nelson's tutor.

The following transcript is taken from an official options negotiation and illustrates the way in which senior staff and form tutors presented a united image of "craft related" subjects as not suited to the able pupil.

[Present are a member of senior staff, a form tutor, the pupil and his mother: the pupil had 'provisionally' chosen Art, Biology, History and Technical Graphics]

Tutor "Looking at your reports Anthony it strikes me that you're quite an able pupil and you might be limiting yourself"  
(...)

Senior "One thing about your comments [staff option assessments] here Anthony, staff have got a good opinion of you."  
  
(...) [The senior reads out some of the assessments and then queries why the pupil has not opted for Geography, which gave a very positive account of his work. He goes on...]

"I wonder if you're being FAIR to yourself in choosing three craft related subjects, that's Technical Graphics, Art and the Design - you've got to do the Design [Compulsory]. I wonder if you didn't ought to be just stretching yourself a little bit more - it's entirely up to you, nobody's going to press you - by taking another academic subject."

Tutor "'Cause Art and Technical Graphics will have a certain degree of cross over."

Senior [To the pupil and parent in lowered tones as if to fellow conspirators] "Don't mention that to the Art department and Technical Graphics or they'll kill us." [laughs]  
  
[All laugh]

Tutor "But they are both related in a way?"

Senior "Yeah."

Tutor "You might be better off doing a [second] science or... "

Senior [Looking at the pupil's assessments] "I would say probably

Geography [a second humanity] might be a better thing. Cause you know, if you think about it that's HALF THE SCHOOL WEEK you're spending in craft related subjects and I wonder if it's a bit much for a lad of your ability. You know whether you ought to think about another academic subject.

Because if you've got ability then you want to do the best you can, and the better the qualifications you've got..."

[The meeting ended with a change of option: from TG to Geography]

It is interesting to note that the senior teacher indicated to the parent and pupil that the current definition of "craft" subjects as 'beneath' the pupil's ability might not be shared by all subject teachers. Although the comment was presented in a humorous way, it was clear that the presentation of subject status in this way was considered a potentially contentious issue (a point I will consider in more detail below).

The presentation of CDT subjects as "less demanding" was not restricted to those which included a strong aesthetic element. Child Care (a relatively new examination subject within the CDT faculty) included a very great deal of theory but was also presented as a practical, relatively undemanding option in official negotiations. Hence, pupils who were considered 'able' by staff were typically discouraged from taking the subject. This is illustrated by the following extract which is taken from an official meeting which I observed.

Senior      [To the pupil and her mother] "I would have thought that Child Care is probably less demanding. Of all the courses ... it tends to be for those pupils who perhaps are struggling with the more academic subjects. Now I would have thought, looking at some of these positions [rank orders] that she's in, for example, 12 out of 200 in Geography, that she's capable of a more CHALLENGING course."

However, craft-based subjects were not the only ones to be accorded low academic status in the option negotiations. In addition to the 'sink' subjects (Applied Science and Double Community Studies) which were specifically aimed at the least able pupils, the courses in Typing, Drama and Community Studies (single

option) were also portrayed as "less demanding" subjects by senior staff; either explicitly (eg. "You're wasting your time in that": senior teacher) or implicitly (eg. in the suggestion that the pupil was "capable of something more demanding": senior teacher).

This distinction between "academic" and "practical" subjects partly reflected the greater prestige accorded the more theoretical and 'bookish' subjects which, as I have already noted, has been a recurrent feature throughout the history of the educational system in this country. In addition, as predicted by Ball (1981), the level at which some of these subjects were examined also labelled them as less-demanding in the eyes of senior staff.

In contrast to the situation in Beachside Comprehensive (Ball, 1981), in City Road the level of examination at which pupils would eventually sit each subject was not decided in the majority of the option negotiations. At the time when the negotiations took place (the age grade's third year) of the 21 optional courses only five led exclusively to CSE examinations: each of the five was characterized as "practical" and/or "less demanding" during official option negotiations. Of these five subjects, two were mode I courses (Typing and Drama), the other three led to mode III examinations only, ie. Applied Science and the Single and Double courses in Community Studies. Applied Science was a Limited Grade examination in which no pupil could attain higher than a CSE grade 3.

In 16 of the 21 optional courses, therefore, both GCE and CSE examinations were officially possible when the pupils completed their compulsory schooling (3). Only one entry on the option pattern ('O' level history in block 2) made any reference to the level of external examination and, even in this case, the designation was not final. In these 16 subjects decisions about the level of entry were to be taken within the subject departments following the fifth year mock examinations (4).

At the time of the option negotiations, therefore, all five subjects which could not be examined at GCE 'O' level were portrayed as 'non-academic' by senior staff and tutors within the City Road options process. Hence a subject like Typing,

which might have very great exchange value in certain job markets, was never raised by senior staff as an alternative which 'able' pupils might wish to consider: if such a pupil was being 'advised' to reconsider any choices (eg. Janet Nelson) an additional mainstream science or humanity option was most frequently mooted.

Generally, therefore, the senior staff and form tutors operated with a very crude dichotomous conception of optional subjects as either academic or non-academic/practical. I have already noted that this broad status division reflects Ball's findings in Beachside (Ball, 1981). In addition the same distinction is confirmed, beyond the walls of City Road Comprehensive, in that it embodied differences in subject status which are applied nationally in the selection of students for places in higher education in this country.

I have shown how both Ball (1981) and Smith and Woodhouse (1982; 1983; 1984) emphasized the relationship between a subject's status and its 'exchange value' in post-school higher education and certain occupational markets. This relationship, if true, should predict the status accorded any subject by reference to the exchange value of an Advanced ('A') level pass in that subject's equivalent (if it has one) in competition for a place at university in this country. Although, in theory, all external examinations of the same official designation should require similar amounts of effort and ability from successful candidates, in practice it is the case that the subjects offered for examination (like the examinations themselves) are not attributed equal value by the 'users' of examination results, ie. employers and institutions of higher education. Hence, a GCE pass grade in one subject may carry more weight in the post school education market than a similar (or higher) grade in another subject.

Until recently little information was available concerning the value placed on different subjects. Studies such as that by Goacher (1984) helped to highlight the variation between different institutions of higher education and employers but there was no clear policy statement on the general status of different examination subjects. Nationally agreed procedures on the comparability of different examination

types already existed, but individual subject departments in higher education often decide not to count examination passes towards their entry requirements in subjects which they feel are 'unsuitable'. Many departments apply similar kinds of criteria but until recently there was no authoritative statement as to which subjects were generally acceptable.

The situation was clarified with the publication of a pamphlet by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Standing Conference on University Entrance (S.C.U.E., 1985). This listed fifty-eight 'A' level subjects which were described as "...universally acceptable individually for the General Entrance Requirement in universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland" (S.C.U.E., 1985: 7). For Ball (1981) and Smith and Woodhouse (1982; 1983; 1984) such subjects are clearly of high academic status. Any subject, therefore, which does not appear in the S.C.U.E. list, or for which there is no equivalent 'A' level, may be considered as being of relatively low academic standing in terms of nation-wide selection procedures in higher education.

Table 4.1 sets out the academic standing of each examinable option subject in City Road. The table reflects the status of the subjects as presented during the option negotiations and the value of the equivalent 'A' level in competition for entrance to a university in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Without exception each of the subjects described during City Road option negotiations as "practical" and relatively "undemanding" does not have an equivalent 'A' level which is "universally acceptable" for university entrance requirements in this country according to the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Standing Conference on University Entrance.

Therefore the broad pattern of differing academic statuses (academic/non-academic) which emerged during the staffs' handling of the official option negotiations in City Road was very much along the lines predicted by previous work on subject status in comprehensive schools and higher education in this country (Ball, 1981; 1987; S.C.U.E., 1985). However, just as some non-academic subjects had

TABLE 4.1: THE ACADEMIC STATUS OF SUBJECT OPTIONS IN CITY ROAD COMPREHENSIVE

<u>ACADEMIC*</u>	<u>NON-ACADEMIC ('Practical')**</u>
Physics	Applied Science
Chemistry	Community Studies (Single)
Biology	Community Studies (Double)
Geography	Technical Graphics
History	Child Care
Religious Education	Typing
German	Drama
French	Metalwork
Computer Studies	Art
	Home Economics/Housecraft
	Textiles/Dress
	Woodwork

Derived from the presentation of optional subjects during the official option negotiations. The same distinction is reflected in the acceptability of equivalent 'A' levels in competition for university entrance in this country.

Note: \* Equivalent 'A' level is "universally acceptable" for university entrance (S.C.U.E., 1985: 7).

\*\* No equivalent 'A' level exists or the equivalent is not generally acceptable for university entrance (S.C.U.E., 1985: 7).

more status than others (not all were 'sink' options) so not all academic subjects enjoyed equally prestigious positions. Therefore, before examining the distribution of academic and non-academic subjects amongst the research age grade, I will briefly consider the differences in status between some of the subjects which were presented as 'academic' in the City Road option meetings.

### The 'mainstream' sciences

The science teachers with whom I spoke, including the Head of the Faculty, felt that the three "main" science options should be treated with equal respect. Past patterns of subject take-up had established Biology as the single most popular science option in the school, however, its teachers felt that they were not receiving a proper mix of pupils. One complained to me that senior staff often discouraged able pupils from taking Biology in favour of Physics or Chemistry.

The existence of this notion of such a science hierarchy was partially confirmed by my observations of option negotiations, which suggested that Physics was the most prestigious of the three subjects. Physics was seen by members of senior staff and form tutors alike as being the most demanding and worthwhile of the sciences. 'Able' pupils, such as Janet Nelson, were congratulated upon such a choice, whilst their 'less able' peers were often discouraged by queries about their mathematical abilities, such as the following from an informal discussion between senior and pupil.

Senior      "Physics.... There's a lot of maths involved in that.  
                  What's your Maths like?" (field notes)

Even when a pupil's rank order stated that they had achieved a higher position in Physics than in either of the other sciences, where the senior and form tutor did not rate the pupil as 'able', the high academic status of the subject could lead to a challenge. For example, the following extract is taken from an official meeting.



[The senior looks through the pupil's science assessments. They are:

Physics: Rank Order 50th. Effort C+  
 Chemistry: Rank Order 60th. Effort C+  
 Biology: Rank Order 90th. Effort C- ]

Senior "There isn't a lot of difference, you've got about half -  
 kind of middle in all three. (...)"

Tutor "Physics is going to be the hardest one isn't it?"

Senior "I would have thought so."

[The pupil eventually followed a Biology option]

Physics was clearly seen by senior staff and form tutors as being the most demanding of the mainstream sciences, however, both Chemistry and Biology retained a significant degree of academic status; they had long histories in the school and enjoyed valuable links with a number of professional occupations. Hence, although Physics was typically described as "the most difficult" mainstream science, Chemistry and Biology were by no means portrayed as "practical" or "non-academic" options.

### The 'mainstream' humanities

Just as the three main science options were not judged to be of equal status as optional subjects during the official negotiations, so there were differences between the three mainstream humanities; Geography, History and Religious Education (RE). As I noted in the previous chapter, the Head of RE felt her subject to be under threat to such an extent that she openly complained about its position in the options pattern. For example, RE was the only mainstream humanity denied all possibility of setting in the fourth and fifth years. Every year the Head of RE "had a go" (her own words) at Jennings over the treatment of her subject, which she felt was seen as something of "a tag-on", not accorded the status of Geography and History. The prevalence of this view was confirmed by my observations and interviews with the seniors and form tutors involved in the option negotiations. No rationale was offered, but it did emerge that pupils who were seen as 'able',

especially males, were often encouraged to consider either History or Geography in preference to RE. The timetable allocation which denied RE the opportunity to set in the upper school was an indication that RE was regarded as inferior to the other mainstream humanities (Geography and History) between which no clear status distinctions were drawn.

The following quotation is from a form tutor discussing the humanity option of a pupil who was seen as one of the 'less able' in the age grade.

"I mean [the pupil]'s doing RE, and er.. because in that column is History 'O' level and Geography...  
Now the ONLY ONE, with the greatest of respect to RE, IS RE."

Although RE was clearly seen by senior staff and tutors as in some ways 'less academic' than History and Geography, the subject maintained its position as a 'mainstream' humanity, ie. it was seen as being closer in status to History and Geography than to the Single Community Studies course which (although not considered a 'sink' option like Double Community Studies) was seen as the "practical" humanity. RE could be taken at GCE 'O' level and a number of 'able' pupils (especially girls) did follow the course in the upper school.

### Computer Studies

Computer Studies experienced a somewhat ambiguous status. The limited number of school machines meant that the number of pupils opting had to be restricted. However, the subject was very popular amongst the pupils and parents who typically saw it as "the thing of the future" (a pupil in an option meeting). Despite Mr Jennings' warnings, to a year assembly, that only a few pupils would be able to follow Computer Studies, in total 67 pupils chose it as a 'provisional' option: 36 finally gained a place on the fourth year courses.

Given the senior staffs' concern with increased success in external examinations, which I outlined in Chapter 2, it was perhaps not surprising that the problem of over-subscription was solved by applying a performance based criterion.

Building upon early links between the Mathematics department and computing in the school, Mr Jennings and the Head decided that each pupil's mathematics rank order would decide entry to Computer Studies.

'A' level qualifications in Computer Studies are widely accepted in competition for a university place in this country (S.C.U.E., 1985) and the overt selection, which decided optional entry in City Road, made Computer Studies one of the most difficult subjects to which a pupil could successfully negotiate access. However, among the senior staff Computer Studies was not viewed as a high status "academic" option in the way that, for example, Physics was. This was partly through a suspicion that the subject was being chosen because of 'fashion' rather than more considered criteria ("a bit of an educational bandwagon": Mr Jennings) and partly because of doubts concerning its acceptability in competition for access to higher education.

The seniors' suspicions concerning Computer Studies are illustrated in the following extract from an interview with Mr Jennings.

"I'm not convinced about Computer Studies.  
I'm not convinced of its usefulness, you know, it sort of slots into the area of Technical Drawing as far as qualifications are concerned. I don't think 'A' level Computer Studies would get you into a university. You know, like TD wouldn't... A CRAFT."

As a result of its somewhat ambiguous academic status in the eyes of senior staff, some 'able' pupils were encouraged to pursue a second humanity or science rather than follow the 'O' level Computer Studies course. However, Computer Studies was never presented as anything other than a "demanding" option. For example:

Mr Jennings      [During an official meeting with an 'able' pupil]  
                         "... it's a hard subject. You've got to work at it you know."

In addition to the seniors' description of the subject as among the "demanding" options, its over-subscription and the open use of selection as a means of controlling access meant that in terms of the senior and tutor's assessment of pupil

'ability' (like the most highly prized of "academic" options) generally it was only pupils who were seen as 'able' who managed to negotiate access to the Computer Studies option.

Therefore, within the crude academic/non-academic (practical) dichotomy which staff presented to pupils and parents during the official option negotiations there were further significant status distinctions; Physics was judged to be the most demanding of the mainstream sciences, RE was generally accorded less standing than Geography and History, and Computer Studies 'enjoyed' an ambivalent position which rendered it one of the most difficult subjects to successfully access despite senior staff reservations concerning its value in certain post-school educational and occupational markets. However, it must be emphasized that such differences were not as great as the much more fundamental divide which senior staff and form tutors drew between the 'academic' and the 'practical'. Even Computer Studies, which Jennings privately saw as akin to a 'craft' subject, was very clearly distinguished from the "less demanding", non-academic options which I described earlier, and which so clearly repeated status distinctions identified in previous studies (Ball, 1981) and statements of 'academic' standing (S.C.U.E., 1985).

ii. Levels of curriculum placement: The distribution of academic and non-academic curricula in the upper school

As I noted earlier in this chapter, some researchers have analysed the options process as representing a form of selection whereby pupils are channelled into upper school curricula of very different statuses; curricula which may well influence their post-school opportunities in very important ways. In the previous chapter I have already mentioned pupils who were indeed encouraged to adopt curricula of contrasting academic natures. For example, Janet Nelson (seen as "very able") was discouraged from a 'practical' low status course of the kind which was presented in a much more positive way to her less able peers. As this description

indicates, however, Janet was identified as representing one extreme of the ability range in the school. In order to gauge something of the options process more generally it is necessary to find a means of distinguishing between the broadly 'academic' and 'non-academic' curricula which some pupils followed, as a result of the options process, in the fourth and fifth years.

One solution has been suggested by Smith and Woodhouse (1983). They defined the 'academic' or 'non-academic' nature of each pupils upper school options by calculating:

"... how many optional subjects the pupil had which were capable of being carried on to sixth-form, of being presented for 'A'-level and of being counted towards normal university entrance requirements."

Smith and Woodhouse (1983: 4)

Unfortunately Smith and Woodhouse do not list which school subjects they thought met these criteria. Certainly no statement such as that by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Standing Conference on University Entrance (S.C.U.E., 1985) was available to them. In light of this publication, however, I am able to apply a revised form of Smith and Woodhouse's conception of "the level of curriculum placement" as a means of highlighting some of the differences between the options studied by pupils in my research age grade.

In the previous section of this chapter I described how the senior staff's broad distinction between "demanding, academic" and "less demanding, non-academic" options mirrored the standing of their equivalent 'A' level subjects in view of the report by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the Standing Conference on University Entrance (S.C.U.E., 1985). This was no coincidence, one of the criteria which senior staff applied in judging subjects was their potential value in competition for a place in higher education. Hence, the options which the senior's portrayed as "less demanding" appear in the right hand column of Table 4.1: 'A' level equivalents in these subjects are not widely accepted towards university entrance. By contrast, those subjects which the senior's held to be of a relatively

more demanding "academic" nature appear in the left hand column. As I have already noted, although Biology and RE were not viewed in the same light as the other mainstream science and humanity options they were seen as being very different to the much "less demanding" and non-academic alternatives of Applied Science and Community Studies. Similarly, although it was viewed with some suspicion by senior staff, access to Computer Studies was generally possible only for pupils who were seen as being amongst the most able in the age grade.

Hence, I shall characterize the academic nature of the upper school curriculum which each pupil negotiated by reference to the broad academic/non-academic (practical) distinction which the senior staff and form tutors applied during the face-to-face option negotiations (a distinction reproduced in Table 4.1).

Notwithstanding the optional elements within the compulsory Mathematics and Design courses, each pupil in City Road was timetabled for four optional subjects in the upper school (5). I shall describe as being of an 'academic curriculum placement' all pupils who followed a majority of options which were generally held to be of an "academic" nature by the senior staff and form tutors who dominated option negotiation in City Road, ie. those pupils who studied at least three optional subjects designated as 'academic' in Table 4.1. Including the compulsory subjects Mathematics and English, such pupils had the opportunity to pass 'O' level or equivalent examinations in at least five 'academic' subjects, ie. the minimum entry requirement for many courses in higher education and increasing sections of the 'professional' occupational markets (Goacher, 1984).

At the other end of the spectrum were the pupils who followed a majority of non-academic (practical) options. Even with the addition of three compulsory subjects, only one of which was non-academic (Design), such pupils experienced a largely "practical", non-academic upper school curriculum.

This categorization creates a third group of pupils who studied an equal number of academic and non-academic options. This was a very heterogeneous group and included some pupils who were seen as 'able' by staff but followed two 'practical'

options. For example, two girls in my case study forms appeared in this category because of occupational aspirations in the field of design. I have chosen to refer to such pupils as being of 'split' level of curriculum placement. Such a term is far from perfect but it does embody not only the mixed academic status of their optional subjects but also their position between the extremes of the curriculum differentiation which occurred during the options process. Although some of these pupils were described as 'able' their optional subjects meant that they no longer had the opportunity to leave City Road with five 'O' level (or equivalent) passes in 'academic' subjects.

I have chosen to consider upper school curricula in terms of a three-fold categorization, clearly a number of different measures could have been adopted. For example, I might have made the 'academic' curriculum level more exclusive by restricting it to only those pupils who followed four academic options. However, such a categorization would not have accurately reflected the differences in the senior staff perceptions of the pupils involved. For example, many 'able' pupils were encouraged to consider a craft-based option if their occupational goal suggested one. In addition most pupils followed a non-academic subject in block 4 of the option pattern partly as a result of the domination of craft-based subjects in that part of the timetable. In deciding upon the definition of academic and non-academic curriculum levels I attempted to remain as close as possible to the distinctions which emerged as the staff channelled pupils towards certain subjects.

Table 4.2 outlines the distribution of the curriculum levels amongst all pupils who experienced the entire options process in City Road. The table shows that overall 52% of pupils emerged from the options with a broadly academic curriculum. 23% of pupils experienced an overwhelmingly non-academic curriculum. Broken down by gender the table reveals that a higher proportion of female pupils appeared in the latter group. This may reflect the generally lower academic status accorded to subjects, such as Typing and Child Care, which are associated with stereotypically

TABLE 4.2: LEVEL OF CURRICULUM PLACEMENT BY PUPIL GENDER

Curriculum Level	Pupil Gender				Total	
	Male		Female			
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Academic	60	67	41	30	52	97
Split	22	24	28	21	24	45
Non-academic	18	20	31	23	23	43
<hr/>						
TOTAL	100	111	100	74	99	185

Note: percentages are based on all pupils present during the entire options process (The Options Sample)(6)



'feminine' roles and have no obvious male counterparts. A breakdown by ethnic origin is presented later in this chapter.

Before interpreting these figures I wish to emphasize that the curriculum levels which are identified in Table 4.2 are analytical, second-order constructs. The characterizations of academic, split and non-academic curricula are not the same as streams, bands or sets which have an existence which is a consciously acknowledged part of the life of all participants in some schools. However, the categorization is derived from the academic/practical status distinction which was generally recognized as operating within City Road, highlighted in the 'advice' of senior staff and form tutors during the option negotiations.

I present the breakdown by curriculum level purely as a means of indicating the scale of some of the differences between the upper school curricula studied by pupils in the research age grade. As such, it is a far from perfect conceptualization. For example, I have already noted that some 'academic' subjects were accorded higher status than others yet such differences are not recognized in Table 4.2. Hence, only a limited account is offered concerning the combination of subjects which made up each pupil's curriculum. Level of curriculum placement is, however, a useful concept at this point in my analysis because it offers the only consistent means of distinguishing between the upper school curricula of the pupils in the research age grade. Despite its limitations, level of curriculum placement does embody very real differences between the subjects which made up each pupil's upper school timetable; differences which were recognized both externally, in the general acceptability of subjects in educational and occupational competition, and within the school itself, reflected in senior staff perspectives and the timetable and resource allocations accorded the subjects.

Clearly, in interpreting Table 4.2 it should not be assumed that pupils of broadly academic curricula were an 'elite'. All the pupils who were seen as 'exceptional' by teachers were in this level, but so too were many others. To borrow a phrase which the guidance staff frequently used during the option preparations,

'doors were still open' for these pupils; they had the opportunity to leave City Road with 'O' level (and equivalent) passes in at least five academic subjects. Alternatively certain occupational and educational doors were no longer open to those of split and non-academic curricula. In particular, the 23% of pupils in the age grade who made up the latter group faced an upper school timetable of predominantly practical, non-academic subjects.

Hence, those pupils of an academic curriculum level had negotiated the first step of a process which would lead some of them, although by no means all, to high achievements in external examinations. The pupils of split curriculum level still retained the possibility of gaining qualifications in some academic subjects which carried weight in most educational and occupational markets. In contrast, the pupils of practical, non-academic curricula had emerged from the options with a timetable dominated by subjects of little or no academic status. They followed a majority of practical, 'applied' options in which educational certification was possible, but of much less standing in many areas of the post-school world.

As in previously studied schools, therefore, in City Road the options process represented an important point in the educational careers of some pupils; a point of curriculum differentiation. The forces behind this differentiation have, however, only been tentatively examined in schools which have used mixed ability as the main grouping strategy in the first three years of secondary education (Ball, 1981; Smith and Woodhouse 1982; 1983; 1984). The following section considers the role of the pupil and staff perspectives which lay behind the differentiation in City Road.

### iii. Pupil choice and staff channelling

In previously studied schools, where academic selection was practiced during the pre-option years, researchers have noted that pupils in different parts of the academic hierarchy sometimes applied different choice criteria. Woods drew a stark contrast between the approaches of certain groups among the pupils he followed and related these to the development of wider "group perspectives" towards school.

"[Pupils in the highest form, 3a,] tended to like subjects for official, supportive, traditional reasons, [those in the lower form, 3c] for unofficial, counter-cultural, social reasons. Thus the first type might like a subject because the teacher makes it interesting, is well organized, can keep order, and gives them to feel that they are learning something; the second type for almost directly opposite reasons, such as having few demands made on them, having great freedom and even 'having a muck about'.... There is a sense of immediate gratification, and jocular acceptance of ultimate destiny. Years of interactions, tests and examinations have taught them their place. By the time of the 3rd year, these processes have completed the sifting, and groups have worked out their *modi vivendi*."

Peter Woods (1976: 133-136)

In City Road, however, most of the pupils in my case study forms tended to apply very similar choice criteria regardless of their image in staff eyes. As I noted in Chapter 2, it was only in exceptional cases that pupils would seek out a "soft" teacher whom they felt would not make too many demands on them. The majority of pupils, with whom I spoke, required similar things of their teachers (order, fairness, humour) and placed much store in those subjects which they felt they were "best at". Hence, the majority of pupils used a perception of their own abilities as a guide, and very few recognized the view that they had ability in no subject. Similarly, some pupils had notions of possible occupational goals and showed a high degree of instrumentality in their choices, quite independent of teachers' perceptions of them.

In choosing their 'provisional' options, therefore, the pupils applied notions of their own ability: ability and enjoyment were the most frequently cited choice criteria. This finding coincides with those of Smith and Woodhouse (1983: 56), who emphasized the "two-fold nature of the options process", and seems to lend support to Ball's view concerning the more effective "socialization of appropriate aspirations" in mixed ability environments (Ball, 1981: 278). However, the situation was a complex one. The pupils I interviewed recognized no simple 'academic' label as they entered the subject options process. They had experienced tests and examinations, but had no notion of themselves as a specific 'type' of

pupil; they had no conception of "their place" in the way that Woods described in Lowfield school. Rather, the City Road pupils tended to see themselves as "good" or "alright" in specific subjects. Very few pupils were identified, by either themselves or their peers, as falling at the extremes of the ability range.

Notions of academic ability were, therefore, very important to the pupils with whom I spoke, yet across the age grade their judgements about subjects and teachers were often based upon very similar criteria. Broad distinctions between types of pupil perspective did not exist.

How closely, then, did the pupils' perceptions of their ability match with those of their teachers? I have already stated in the previous chapter that, having registered their 'provisional' choices, of the 68 pupils in the three forms which I studied throughout the options process only 7 (10%) had no further option meetings with staff. Some of these meetings were arranged by parents rather than staff, therefore, it may be more accurate to consider the 7 pupils as a proportion of those who did not attend official meetings. Of the 30 pupils whose parents did not visit the school the 7 represent a proportion of 23%. If these patterns of experience were repeated in the other five forms in the age grade, and I have no evidence to suggest that they were not, it would appear that the majority of pupils, possibly as many as 75%, experienced some form of additional negotiation after making their 'provisional' choices. Thus there would appear to have been a very high degree of staff intervention following the submission of 'provisional' choices. This raises further questions. For example, on the basis of what criteria did the staff intervene and how 'successful' were they?

Subsequent sections of this chapter consider the influence of pupil gender and ethnic origin but for the moment I wish to concentrate on the number and 'academic nature' of the changes which occurred between the submission of 'provisional' choices and the final distribution of optional subjects.

In the introduction to the previous chapter I noted that 44 of the 68 pupils in my three case study forms (65%) changed one or more of their 'provisional' choices.

These changes involved 66 separate optional decisions and Table 4.3 presents a breakdown of the academic character of each of the changes by comparing the academic status of the 'provisional' choice and that of the final option (as set out in the previous section: see Table 4.1). Many of the changes (45% of the 66 separate options discussed) did not involve any large change in status, although they were often perceived as important by the staff and pupils involved. For example, a successful challenge to a choice of Physics and recommendation Biology would often include an element of 'cooling out', yet it would be listed as a new option of broadly the 'same' status in Table 4.3. Although such variation between the different 'academic' subjects is not highlighted in the data, 36 of the 66 changes (55%) are identified as involving a substantial change in the academic status of the option. When broken down by gender it emerges that the majority of female pupils' changes involved subjects of a broadly similar academic level. Once again this may reflect the generally lower status of stereotypically 'feminine' subjects.

In terms of the total number of option decisions the amount of alteration may appear small (Table 4.4), and this may support Ball's general thesis that mixed ability teaching is a successful means of socializing "appropriate aspirations" (Ball, 1981: 278). In relation to the pupils' overall experiences of the options process, however, the staff retained an important role as "choice mediators" (Woods, 1977). Very few pupils experienced a minimum of staff involvement. It is possible that as many as 75% of the age grade faced additional negotiations following their 'provisional' decisions and within my case study forms 65% (44 pupils) changed at least one 'provisional' option. For both sexes more than one third of the alterations involved a substantial change in the academic status of the option.

I have already detailed several examples of staff negotiating criteria and techniques, for example, in my analysis of Carol Barber's official meeting and the presentation of different subject statuses in the school. In the previous chapters I have noted how the senior staff and form tutors used the option assessments as guides to pupil 'abilities' and these were an important force behind many of the

TABLE 4.3: THE ACADEMIC CHARACTER OF THE ALTERATIONS TO "PROVISIONAL" OPTIONS IN THREE MIXED ABILITY FORMS

Changed "Provisional" options						
Academic Status of the new option	Male		Female		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Higher	19	9	26	5	21	14
Similar	40	19	58	11	45	30
Lower	40	19	16	3	33	22
<hr/>						
All new options	99	47	100	19	99	66

TABLE 4.4: ALTERATIONS TO "PROVISIONAL" OPTIONS IN THREE MIXED ABILITY FORMS (Four options per pupil)

"Provisional" options						
	Male		Female		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Changed	28	47	18	19	24	66
No Change	72	121	82	85	76	206
<hr/>						
All options	100	168	100	104	100	272

negotiations which I observed. They were, however, by no means the only criterion. For example, 62 of the 455 separate assessments, which optional departments wrote concerning my case study pupils, included strongly worded requests that the pupil should/should not opt for that subject. 43 of the pupils' 'provisional' options fulfilled these requests without further negotiation. Eventually another 10 of these requests were realized after informal or official negotiations. Therefore 56 (85%) of the changes reported in Table 4.3 cannot have resulted from explicit recommendations by subject departments in their written pupil assessments and very few can have been 'renegotiated' without a significant degree of senior staff involvement (see Chapters 2 and 3). Such renegotiations reflected a variety of criteria which the seniors and form tutors applied in assessing the suitability of each pupil's options: senior staff and tutor's assessments of pupil 'ability' were a crucial, but not exclusive, factor.

In this section I have outlined the results of the option negotiations in terms of the differentiation of curriculum levels in the upper school and have demonstrated the active role which staff assumed as "choice mediators" (Woods, 1977). Within this context, the following sections consider the influence of pupil gender and ethnic origin.

#### 4.2 PUPIL GENDER AND THE SUBJECT OPTION PROCESS

When I began my field work in City Road I feared that my own socialization, which generated so many gender-based stereotypes and assumptions within me, might have left me ill prepared to research the influence of gender upon the perceptions of other actors. Although I have no doubt that to some extent my fears were well grounded, I was often shocked by the extent to which gender could limit the possibilities of subject choice open to some pupils.

This section places the experiences of the pupils within the wider context of

gender related subject specialization revealed in previous studies. Having noted the similarities between this and other works concerned with gender based take-up rates, I offer some evidence towards an explanation of those rates in City Road.

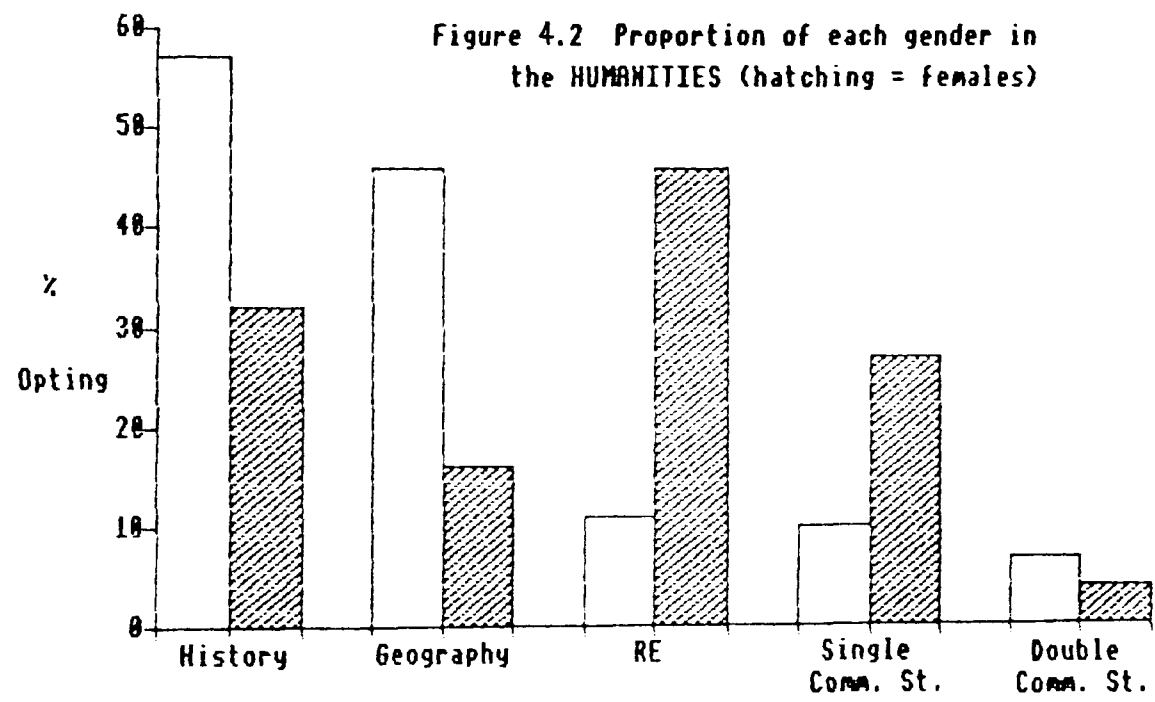
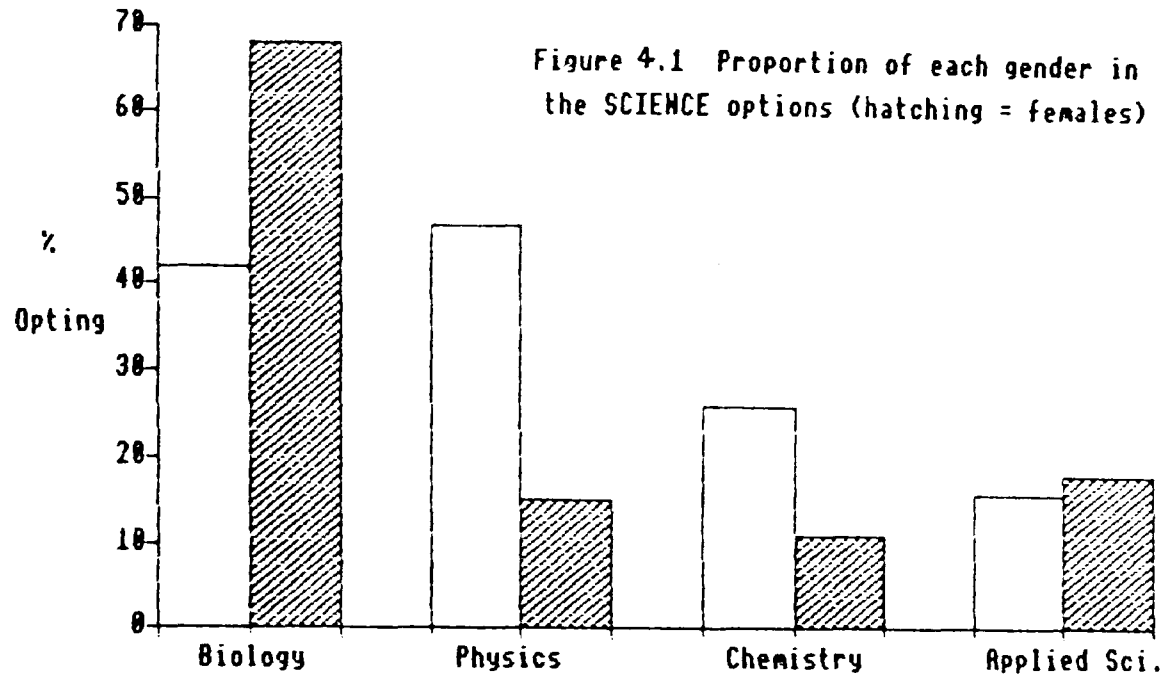
a) Pupil gender and patterns of subject specialization

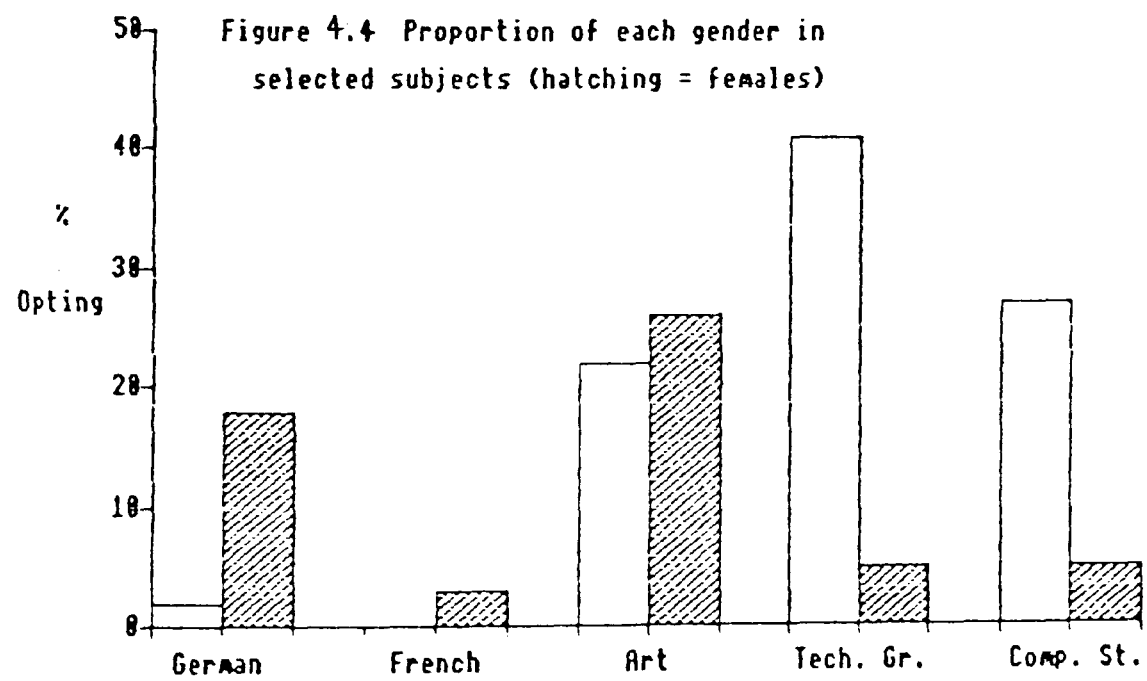
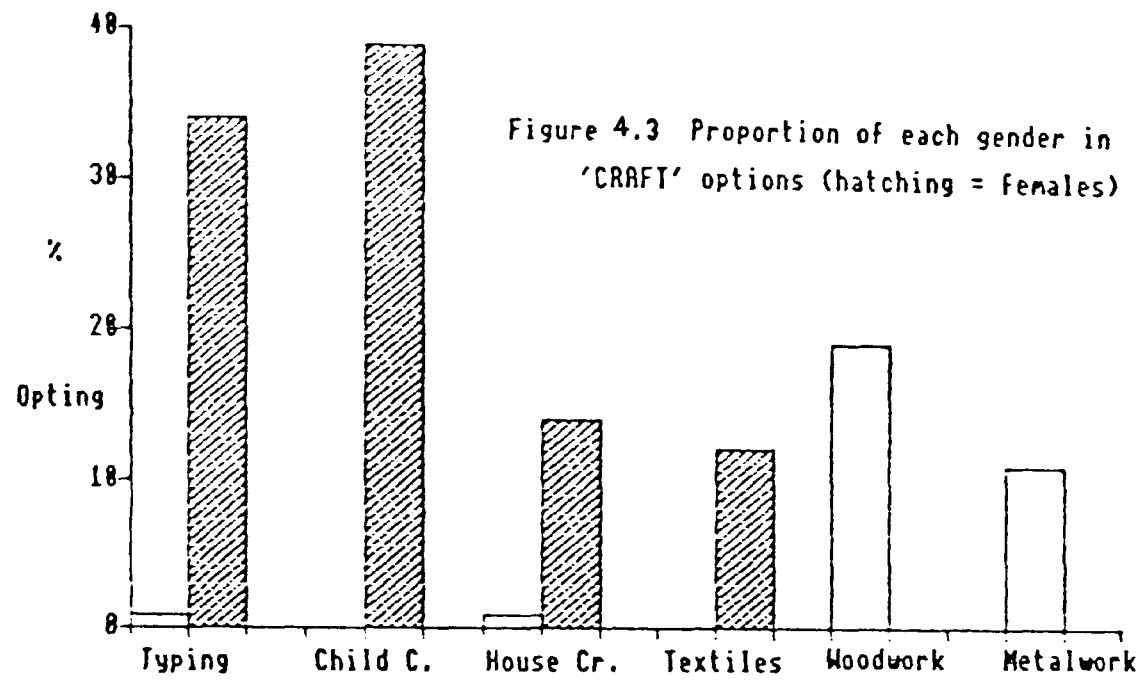
Despite conscious attempts to change patterns of subject take-up, such as the "Girls Into Science and Technology" project (Kelly et al, 1984), studies of subject specialization in mixed schools at 14-plus have revealed a relatively consistent pattern of gender related differences (7). Many such patterns were replicated within City Road. Figures 4.1 to 4.4 present subject take-up rates by pupil gender for the entire research age grade (the data is presented more fully in Appendix 5).

In a summary of work in this field, Pratt and his colleagues (1984: 6-17) note that girls tend to 'opt out' of the sciences where they are permitted a totally free choice. In cases where pupils must choose at least one science option girls overwhelmingly opt for Biology. Boys are more likely to choose one of the physical sciences, ie. Physics and Chemistry (I.L.E.A., 1984: 54), although in schools which require at least one science option the proportion of males who choose Biology does seem to increase (Pratt et al, 1984: 94). Also more boys tend to study two sciences.

Each of these findings is reproduced within City Road. All pupils were required to opt for at least one science and Biology accounted for the highest proportion of female science options: 50 girls (68% of females present throughout the options process) opted for Biology. The next most 'popular' science for girls was the limited grade CSE mode III Applied Science course, which was followed by 13 female pupils (18% of females in the age grade). Although quite a high proportion of male pupils studied Biology (42% of all males present throughout the options process), Physics was the single most popular male science option, and a much higher proportion of males studied one or more of the physical sciences than did their female peers: 52 (47%) of the males in the age grade opted for Physics and 29 (26%)







chose Chemistry. In contrast, only 11 (15%) and 8 (11%) of the girls in the age grade chose those subjects respectively. Similarly, out of all pupils present throughout the City Road options process only 8 (11%) girls studied two sciences, compared with 34 (31%) boys.

Nationally girls seem much more likely to opt for a modern language (ie. French and German) than their male peers. A fact which has caused some concern among language teachers (eg. Powell, 1984). Once again City Road replicated the national trend; of all pupils present throughout the entire options process only two males (2%) chose German compared with 13 girls (18%).

Craft-based and technical courses also show a striking pattern of different take-up rates between the sexes. Traditionally males have been seen to opt for subjects like Woodwork and Metalwork, while girls dominate domestic and commercial subjects. There is also evidence of an over-representation of males in the newer 'technical' subjects, such as Computer Studies (H.M.I. Welsh Office, 1984). In relation to these subjects the evidence from City Road again tends to replicate the patterns of subject take-up noted in previous works: with the exception of Art almost all of the two year 'practical' options were dominated by pupils of one gender. Hence, no female pupil studied a two year course in Woodwork or Metalwork, just as no male studied Child Care or Textiles/Dress. Both Technical Graphics and Computer Studies were dominated by boys, while Typing and Housecraft had only a single male pupil each (8).

In many ways, therefore, City Road followed the typical pattern of subject take-up by pupil gender. The following section considers the mechanisms which lay behind these patterns in the school and may add to the discussion of gender stereotyping in education more generally.

b) The processes of subject specialization by gender

The full range of explanations which have been offered in an attempt to account for gender related differences in subject specialization is too great to be fully summarized here. Clearly the traditional male and female role stereotypes continue to influence those involved in the choice process; teachers, parents and pupils. Assumptions about the sexes' likely occupational and family roles have been seen to influence how 'useful' certain subjects are thought to be. For example, girls often assume (and are told) that Typing would be more useful than Electronics. In Chapter 2 I noted that where my case study pupils had clear occupational aspirations these often reflected common gender stereotypes, with boys wanting to be pilots or bricklayers, while girls imagined themselves in clerical work or becoming an air hostess. Indeed gender-based assumptions about the job market were such that several girls chose Typing because they felt that if they could not get the job they really wanted they would probably be able to find office work to tide them over. One consequence of these views may have been to lower the curriculum level of many girls. For example, Child Care was presented as involving 'caring for others' and proved very popular among the girls, some of whom hoped for careers in nursing or social work. Child Care and Typing clearly reflected very strong stereotypes concerning the female role in the post-school world and each was chosen by more than a third of the girls in the year, yet both subjects were perceived by senior staff (and many in the higher educational world) as having relatively little academic status.

Gender stereotypes may also be reinforced through the very design of options systems which can make non-traditional choices more unlikely. For example, by grouping all craft subjects together (Pratt et al, 1984: 114) or by offering subjects which appeal directly to established gender stereotypes concerning roles in the family and the economy, such as Child Care (Grafton et al, 1983). Once again in City Road there was some evidence of this: in the main option pattern the majority of craft subjects appeared together in a single choice 'block'. Similarly courses

like Child Care and Textiles/Dress clearly appealed to certain images of the female role in the post-school world.

Some writers have argued that gender-based differences in educational experience should be seen as part of a complex series of relationships which concern pupils and teachers of both sexes (Davies, 1984). This shift in emphasis is reflected in an article by Lynda Measor (1983), which looks at pupils' attitudes towards Natural and Domestic sciences during the first year of secondary education. Measor's interactionist approach reveals that socialization into gender roles is not something that pupils passively receive from others. Measor argues that pupils take an active part in the construction of conventionally 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles which both reflect and generate wider societal pressures.

"The girls signalled their objection to the dirt and fumes and smells of [Natural] science, and also to being asked to look less attractive [in unisex laboratory goggles]. They displayed themselves as squeamish, frightened and weak, by their objections to science, and somewhat incompetent as well, especially in relation to certain kinds of complex machinery and technology. The activities in science contravened conventional views of what 'proper' girls should do, and therefore the girls resisted doing them. The pupils were reading sex related characteristics into activities and things, and responding to them as a result. This response goes to make their sex-based identity clear to those around them."

Lynda Measor (1983: 179)

Measor concluded that "Both boys and girls select curriculum areas to act as marker flags for their identities" (Measor, 1983: 189). Measor's analysis is an important contribution to our understanding of pupil perspectives but it should not be interpreted as suggesting that gender related patterns of subject specialization are a purely 'pupil-generated' phenomenon. While she does note that comments by subject teachers can reflect and reinforce gender-based images of certain subjects, Measor does not actually consider the various influences at work in a subject choice process. Rather, she theorizes about the likely impact of such attitudes when the pupils make decisions later on in their school careers. My own observations within City Road suggest that equal attention should be paid to the role of teachers, as

agents who actively reinforced gender stereotypes at all levels of the options process.

Partially as a result of the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975, there had been some moves to lessen sexual stereotyping within City Road. For example, pupils rotated between all craft subjects during their first three years, hence, boys experienced Home Economics while girls spent some time in Woodwork shops. Despite such moves many members of staff continued to hold beliefs about the nature of their subject specialism which could influence their readiness to accept certain pupils. The following is taken from an interview with a male craft teacher.

"I know I'm not supposed to say this, but this is a WORKSHOP... It's a MAN'S world in here. There's machinery that'll take your arm off. I don't know, girls just don't fit in here, they don't understand it."  
(field notes)

As the first part of the above quotation reveals, such teachers often recognized that their views were not officially sanctioned and this kind of open 'admission' was rare. The teachers who acknowledged such feelings typically said that they tried not to let them 'interfere' over questions of subject choice yet throughout the entire options process I saw teachers reinforcing gender stereotypes by challenging non-traditional choices. It is crucial to understand that teachers were not consciously trying to channel boys away from 'girls' subjects' and vice versa. Rather they were querying choices which in their eyes seemed to indicate the possibility of future "trouble" of some sort. For example, before he forwarded his tutees' 'provisional' choices to the senior staff, Mr Palmer (3A's form tutor) read through the completed option sheets and spoke to 13 pupils about choices which he felt were unsuitable or ignored alternatives which had given favourable assessments. These "discrepancies" (as he called them) were only ever challenged in a very gentle way unless they conflicted with gender stereotypes. During form periods I saw eight such queries and where a pupil opted for a subject which had given him/her a poor assessment, Mr Palmer would ask them about the choice, always prefacing his inquiry with "It's up to you". This acted against any sense of confrontation and emphasized

the ideal of freedom of choice, lessening the strength of the challenge. In two cases where the choice was 'unusual' for a pupil of that gender, however, no such reminder of freedom of choice was offered and the 'tone' of the query was harsher, as in the following example.

Mr Palmer  
(form tutor) "Now then squire is right?" [Points to the choice of main  
'Design' option]

Ashley Roberts "Yeah."

Tutor "Home Economics?"

Ashley "Cookery."

Tutor "You want to do cookery?"

Ashley [Nods]

Tutor "For a year. For the whole of your fifth year.  
Are you sure?"

Ashley [Moves around to look down at the option sheet on  
Palmer's desk] "Er... I definitely want to do cookery."

Tutor "For a whole year?"

Ashley "Hang on a minute sir, I - No, I want to do that."  
[Points to another subject]

Tutor "Woodwork?"

Ashley "Yes sir."

Mr Palmer's challenge was based upon his belief that Ashley must have misunderstood the option pattern, he could not accept that the pupil genuinely wanted to study Home Economics for "a whole year". Similarly, when the 'provisional' options went forward for senior staff approval any choices which contravened the traditional gender-related images of some subjects were viewed as a sign of either 'faulty' preparation or deliberate mischief.

A member of  
senior staff "[A male pupil], he's picked CHILD CARE. Somebody said to me 'It's 'cause he likes being with the girls'. [Smiles] I don't know.  
I'm a bit worried about that, he's picked Child Care and Typing. Now there's not much thought gone behind those choices..."

It was interesting that the only female member of senior staff was also the only senior not involved in the options process. One of her male colleagues explained, "She's got her hands full as it is." Her absence meant that male members of senior staff were the only ones involved in vetting 'provisional' options and making 'recommendations'.

Although the examples above focus upon choices which had been made by male pupils, girls who had chosen 'male' subjects faced similar queries from staff. In addition it seemed that female pupils faced particular problems because subjects with high academic status often carried 'masculine' associations. Hence, female pupils who were channelled towards more 'feminine' subjects might also move into 'less academic' options. In the negotiations which I observed, for example, girls who chose Physics were routinely questioned about the option. Even where the pupil was seen as being quite 'able', there was a tendency for the senior staff and tutors to assume that Biology was a more obvious choice of science for the girls.

[During an official options meeting. The pupil's science assessments were:

Physics: Rank Order 94th. Effort C+  
Chemistry: Rank Order 144th. Effort B  
Biology: Rank Order 149th. Effort C-]

Senior "Do you think you're gonna cope with Physics?"

Diane Flowers  
(pupil) "Erm... I find it easier than the rest of them."

Senior "Do you? Easier than Biology?"

Diane "Yeah."

This kind of routine query sometimes led to a change in option choice and acted to reinforce the gender-based images of courses such as Physics, Computer Studies, Woodwork and Metalwork ('Male subjects') and Biology, Religious Education, Child Care, Housecraft and Textiles ('Female subjects').

That some 'academic' subjects (like Physics) were also linked with a largely



male pupil take-up was not the only barrier facing girls who wished to study an academic selection of subjects. To an extent there was a conflict between some pupils' physical appearance and presentation of self and the staff's acceptance of academic ability. Girls who were physically 'attractive', attempted to incorporate fashion within the boundaries of school uniform and sometimes wore make-up, had difficulty in being taken seriously as a person with the potential for an academic future. The following transcript is from an interview with a member of senior staff and concerns a girl of obviously high achievement.

Member of

senior staff "She was [within the top 25 pupils in every subject] but she's not doing what she ought to be doing [ie. not working hard enough]. It's her mother not wishing to upset daughter, and daughter - obviously by looking at her - more interested in fashion and chasing the lad's than she is in her education (...) Now she's probably not gonna go out of here with what she should have, or what she's capable of. Mind you, looking at her, she's a naturally intelligent girl, I would imagine she picks up what she does in school without really trying."

This extract is important because of the links which the senior draws between the pupil's appearance and her likely educational performance. Despite the pupil's achievements in each subject, the senior felt that she was not putting in enough effort: "obviously by looking at her - more interested in fashion and chasing the lads than she is in her education". In conclusion, on the basis of the pupil's appearance, even her past achievements were devalued inasmuch as the senior assumed that they came "naturally" to her rather than through hard work. In this case the pupil's appearance signalled a concern with fashion and 'pop' culture that the senior felt incongruent with future academic success.

Obviously it would be easy to read too much into the comments of one member of staff concerning a single pupil, however, I also noted that the senior involved in Janet Nelson's official meeting commented privately to me afterwards that:

"She's a bright girl she is... She looks it though doesn't she, somehow?"

Janet was a tall, bespectacled girl who was not considered to be 'good looking' by her peers.

I do not wish to infer that every girl who seemed in any way 'attractive' was automatically assumed to be stupid, rather I would state that in City Road, signs of a concern with what many male staff saw as 'feminine preoccupations' (eg. make up, fashion) may have acted against that pupil's image, in the eye's of male senior staff, as someone who took education seriously.

In many ways, therefore, City Road replicated national patterns of gender-based subject specialization and even within this single setting the causes were very complex. The design of the option pattern and the assumptions and aspirations of the pupils themselves, often led to choices which reflected wider societal images of 'male' and 'female' roles. Staff were actors of critical importance in the option process and, through their concern to avoid problems in the future, they could actively reinforce gender stereotypes. Hence, those pupils (of either sex) who offered non-traditional choices would almost always meet some form of query. Female pupils in particular experienced challenges to certain 'academic' options. For example, Physics was viewed as a 'male' option and in at least one case a pupil's physical appearance raised doubts concerning her future readiness to devote herself to schoolwork.

#### 4.3 ETHNIC ORIGIN AND THE SUBJECT OPTION PROCESS

##### a) Previous work on ethnic origin and subject choice

Despite the current debate on the educational achievement of pupils from different ethnic groups, very little attention has been paid to the question of subject specialization. Ethnographic and small scale research such as that by

Sharpe (1976), Fuller (1980), Middleton (1983) and Wright (1984) has not included data on subject choice.

A large scale study by a team based at Keele University and funded by the Department of Education and Science (of which Wright's account of two schools is a part) has included some data on pupils' perceptions of their choices at 14-plus. The Keele team used information drawn from a questionnaire given to fifth year pupils (Eggleston et al, 1984: 91), and consequently the material should be interpreted with caution: my own research has shown that on some occasions pupils' retrospective accounts of the choice process, given only a few weeks after the 'decisions' were made, can bear little resemblance to the negotiations as observed.

The Keele team found little variation between the views of pupils of different ethnic origins (Eggleston et al, 1984: 167-71), although some interesting factors did emerge. South Asian pupils of both sexes (although especially the boys) tended to emphasize Physics and Chemistry as being 'useful' subjects while in comparison with white pupils "ethnic minority girls, particularly the Afro-Caribbean girls were more likely to think Biology was useful" (Eggleston et al, 1984: 170).

It is dangerous to base generalizations upon the experiences of small populations, and this is particularly the case when considering pupils of different ethnic origins within City Road. As I noted in Chapter 2, however, there was some support for the Keele findings in that all eight West Indian girls in City Road chose Biology as their only science option.

It is difficult to draw any wider conclusions about the relation between the Keele findings and the evidence from City Road because of differences in the methodologies of the two studies. The former looked at more than twenty schools and relied to a great extent upon various questionnaires. Consequently, the Keele study can tell us little about the processes of subject choice. For example, in response to the question "Which of the following people (yourself, mother, father, teachers and friends) was important when you made your choice of school subjects?", "There was a tendency for ethnic minority respondents to regard teachers as more important

than white pupils did." (Eggleston et al, 1984: 167-8) The meaning of this pattern of responses cannot be assumed: does it signify that pupils of ethnic minority origin assigned more importance to the views of their teachers, or, does it report increased action by teachers as 'gatekeepers' who controlled access to subjects? Clearly these interpretations are very different, either or both may be correct, but the available data cannot help us decide.

This study of City Road comprehensive represents the first ethnography of subject options in a multi-ethnic school and adds to what is currently a very limited pool of knowledge. In a brief study of a multi-ethnic secondary school Barrie Middleton (1983) did consider the selection of pupils for the separate bands but did not report on the options process. Sally Tomlinson (1986) has made some reference to a larger study of option choice in eighteen multi-ethnic schools, which she is currently involved in, but no findings are available at the time of writing.

#### b) Ethnic origin and experience of the City Road options system

##### i. Language and the participation of Asian parents

The previous chapter demonstrated that the senior staff's perception of each pupil's 'best interests' was often dominant. In the case of two Asian pupils in my case study forms, however, the possibilities for any real participation were effectively denied before the option meetings were even arranged. The cause lay in the school's failure to provide for parents whose spoken English was not good. A reflection of City Road's lack of innovation in relation to the consequences of the multi-ethnic pupil population.

In the case of two of the Asian pupils in my case study forms language acted as a barrier to parental involvement in the official negotiations. Parveen Sughra (a girl in 3D) was represented in the meeting by her father's brother whom, she explained to me afterwards, "can speak better". Throughout his official meeting Rafiq Ali (a boy in 3A) had to act as an interpreter for his mother. In the latter case, language formed an almost impenetrable barrier which severely limited the

parent's role in the negotiation. That the school made no provision for parents for whom English was a second language reflected the level of multicultural provision in the curriculum generally. Even after Rafiq's meeting, and despite the steady intake of Asian pupils into City Road, no steps were taken to consider the implications for future negotiations.

Despite the attention given to the problems of pupils for whom English is a second language there has been remarkably little concern for the position of parents. For example, the recent 'Swann report' devoted an entire chapter to "Language and Language Education", but only briefly considered the consequences for parental involvement.

"Looking beyond the language field, if a pupil's parents are not familiar with the British educational system and may not be fully fluent in English, this may call for particular sensitivity and appreciation of the situation in the school's arrangements for home/school liaison in order to enable the parents to play their full part in supporting their child's education."

The Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups (HMSO, 1985: 325-6)

The complexity of these issues is great and some of the sense of bewilderment felt by white teachers attempting to bring about real parental participation, despite language difficulties, are discussed in a recent article by an Adviser on Multicultural Education (French, 1986). Yet in City Road there was no perception of any 'problem' concerning the participation of Asian parents. In conjunction with the Local Education Authority the school offered courses in Urdu and Punjabi which could be followed as additional subjects in the upper school, yet there was no attempt to incorporate either language in letters sent to parents, or to provide 'cover' when parents were to visit the school.

With the exception of those cases noted above, as a group the Asian pupils that I followed displayed no characteristics which set them apart from the wider pupil sample in terms of their preparation for and negotiation of subject choices.

However, the influence of ethnic origin upon pupils' experience of the options system was not limited to language difficulties.

ii. West Indian pupils and 'spontaneous' staff challenges

I have noted that four members of the school's senior staff went through the 'provisional' choices and made recommendations for renegotiation, based largely upon their interpretation of the departmental 'rank order' information on each pupil. Initially these recommendations were presented by form tutors, but occasionally senior staff would see pupils personally. However, some pupils were interrogated about their option choices without the incentive of any official, written 'recommendation'. I observed that pupils who had a reputation as potential "troublemakers" were sometimes seen by members of staff (senior or form teachers) quite independently of the official system of choice supervision.

These meetings seemed to occur quite spontaneously, with no premeditation over which pupils should be seen. For example, as they met during the routine of the day a teacher might simply decide to probe a pupil about his/her choices. Unless the pupil changed their options as a result there was no record of these 'spontaneous' negotiations, and I observed too few to reach any definite conclusions about the selection of pupils, apart from their image as potential "trouble". However, I did develop the impression that West Indian pupils were particularly prone to this form of enquiry. Unlike some of their white peers, none of the West Indian pupils in my case study forms emerged from the options without further negotiation with either a senior or form teacher following their 'provisional' choices.

The following extract offers an example of one such 'spontaneous' negotiation and is taken from my field notes written during the interaction.

[Having established that the pupil had 'provisionally' chosen two sciences;  
Physics and Biology]

A teacher            "I wonder if you're gonna be happy doing all these...  
                              There's alot of science there.    Physics - alot of maths,  
                              which you don't get on with do you?  
                              You can tell me to [blows a 'raspberry'] ... but I'm

wondering if you should do Applied Science."

Pupil (a male  
West Indian) [Frowns]

Teacher           "- Just let me finish before you say 'No'. I think it's a lot, it's just a personal point on Physics, you're gonna find the maths difficult. I think one science is enough, don't you?"

Pupil             [Looks past the teacher. Expressionless]

Teacher           "Don't sulk. If you don't, TELL me you don't. (...) If you want to do Biology fine. But I think - and it's just my opinion - I think you'll find two sciences too much. (...) [After recapping on the mathematics involved in Physics] They might not explain it properly, just quickly mention it, then expect you to know it. And there's nothing worse than not knowing what's going off. If I were you I'd avoid Physics like the plague. Do you want to stay with Biology?"

Pupil             "I like Physics as well."

Teacher           "Well if I were you I'd have a think. Why don't you have a word with [your Mathematics teacher]?"

(field notes)

The negotiation ended with no change to the pupil's options. Afterwards I spoke with the member of staff, who confirmed that his concern was not only that the pupil "could not cope" with his 'provisional' choices, but that he would disrupt the lessons,

"He'll be swinging from the rafters in two weeks." (field notes)

It may be purely coincidental that the imagery of this statement echoes some of the more 'crude' kinds of racial stereotyping, certainly the teacher involved was unaware of any ethnic bias in the selection of pupils he saw and would be deeply insulted by such a suggestion. However, I did feel that the remark had some significance in relation to the occurrence of seemingly 'spontaneous' negotiations, which often involved West Indian pupils. The previous chapter detailed the channelling of Wayne Johnson (a West Indian) and showed how the senior applied

motives concerned with social control, rather than educational opportunity, to the selection of 'suitable' subjects. In the case noted above a similar concern, with avoiding later disruption, lay behind the attempt to 'cool out' the pupil and place him in the low status 'sink' science option.

The negotiations (both informal and official) which I observed during the options process were not sufficient to reach any firm conclusion about the teacher-West Indian pupil relationship at this point but I did suspect that as a group West Indian pupils were more likely to be seen as potential "trouble" and therefore may have met more 'spontaneous' challenges than their peers of other ethnic origins. Certainly a perspective which saw West Indians as a disproportionate source of "trouble" would have reflected a view which has often been spoken of in the educational press (see Bagley, 1976) and was found by Middleton (1983) in his study of West Indian boys in Valley View Comprehensive.

Middleton argued that the behavioural labels which were attached to the group of fourth year West Indian boys, whom he followed for a term, were such that their teachers assigned them to the lower of two ability bands. Hence, even where their 'ability' was officially the same as quieter white pupils, differences emerged. All 13 white males who were listed as "borderline" were allocated to the A band while 6 of the 7 "borderline" West Indians found themselves in the B band (Middleton, 1983: 86). Similarly, Cecile Wright reported a disproportionate number of Afro-Caribbean pupils in the lower band of one of the two West Midland schools which she studied (Wright, 1984: 240-1).

Findings such as those of Middleton (1983) and Wright (1984) might lead one to expect that in City Road the West Indians would be concentrated in the non-academic level of curriculum placement. In fact, as Table 4.5 shows this was not the case, if anything West Indian pupils were under-represented in that level. The reason for this lies in the very basic difference between academic selection which is practiced overtly in banding allocation and covertly through option negotiations. As I emphasized in the previous two chapters, the options process retained a very real



TABLE 4.5: LEVEL OF CURRICULUM PLACEMENT BY GENDER AND ETHNIC ORIGIN

		Ethnic Origin									
		White		W. Indian		Asian		Mixed R.		Total	
MALE		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
	Academic	59	51	78	7	64	7	40	2	60	67
	Split	21	18	22	2	18	2	40	2	22	24
	Non-academic	20	17	0	0	18	2	20	1	18	20
FEMALE											
	Academic	38	23	38	3	100	2	67	2	41	30
	Split	28	17	50	4	0	0	0	0	28	21
	Non-academic	34	21	13	1	0	0	33	1	31	23
ALL PUPILS											
	Academic	50	74	59	10	69	9	50	4	52	97
	Split	24	35	35	6	15	2	25	2	24	45
	Non-academic	26	38	6	1	15	2	25	2	23	43
-----											
	Total	100	147	100	17	99	13	100	8	99	185

Note: Percentages are based on the options sample.

concern with 'choice'. On occasions the pupils did not get their first choices but, unlike banding allocations, the options were negotiated, not dictated. I would argue that the City Road staff applied selection criteria which were essentially very similar to those described by Middleton (1983) yet they had to negotiate which subjects each pupil would take.

The important point is that the West Indian pupils in City Road had the opportunity to negotiate access to high status, 'academic' subjects; the pupils in Middleton's Valley View had no say in their band allocation. For example, in the 'spontaneous' negotiation which I described above, despite a concerted challenge from the member of staff, who initially tried to channel him towards the 'sink' option of Applied Science, the pupil retained two mainstream sciences. The pupil achieved this because he simply would not accept any of the teacher's justifications for reconsidering his choices. The pupil adopted a strategy which maintained a 'distance' between himself and the teacher, ie. sitting quietly, avoiding eye contact and refusing to be drawn into a discussion. Even when the teacher accused him of "sulking" (a somewhat insulting term which infers immaturity) the pupil did not break his silence and try to justify his choices. This was a strategy which several West Indian pupils adopted when faced with potentially conflictual situations and, because the staff wanted to bring about changes through discussion rather than 'force', it was a most effective form of resistance during the options process (9). By refusing to consider staff 'advice' pupils at either end of the perceived range of ability and behaviour (Janet Nelson in the previous chapter and the West Indian pupil above) led the teachers to accept 'defeat' rather than destroy the current definition of the process as one which was fundamentally concerned with 'choice'.

A more detailed analysis of the relationships between teachers and West Indian pupils, and a consideration of the links between ethnicity and pupil subculture are presented later in this work. In respect of the options process and the material

which I gathered throughout the pupils' third year in City Road, I feel that I may reasonably suggest that while the West Indian pupils as a group may have experienced more staff 'interference' (in that they were more likely to encounter 'spontaneous' challenges), the strategies which they tended to adopt during informal face-to-face negotiations were such that staff 'advice' was translated into changes of subject choice less frequently than was usually the case for other pupils.

I have no further direct evidence that the West Indian pupils' negotiating strategy set them apart in this way. However, there was some indication that the West Indian pupils negotiated different curricula levels to those of most of their peers (of other ethnic origins) who had shared certain of their experiences during the third year.

I have stated above that pupils who were seen as potential "troublemakers" seemed more prone to receiving 'spontaneous' challenges. In the previous chapter I have also noted that such pupils were typically channelled towards non-academic upper school curricula. However, this was apparently not the case for the West Indian pupils. By referring to school detention books it was possible to isolate those pupils who had experienced a significant degree of conflict with the school to the extent that they had received two or more senior management detentions during the third year (10). Table 4.6 shows the level of curriculum placement which these pupils eventually negotiated during the options process.

Although the numbers are small, it is interesting to note that all 4 West Indians who received two or more detentions that year negotiated a broadly academic upper school curriculum: this included the pupil whose informal negotiation was reported above. However, this was true of only 2 of the 13 non-West Indians who received two or more third year detentions. The difference may reflect the consequences of the negotiating strategy outlined above. Certainly my own observations suggested that the West Indian pupils received the same, if not more, staff challenges as their peers of other ethnic origins yet their responses acted to safeguard their original choices.

TABLE 4.6: THE LEVEL OF CURRICULUM PLACEMENT NEGOTIATED BY PUPILS IN  
RECEIPT OF TWO OR MORE THIRD YEAR DETENTIONS (Both sexes)

2 or more third year detentions	Curriculum Level						Total	
	Academic		Split		Non-academic			
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
White, Asian and Mixed race	15	2	23	3	62	8	100	13
West Indian	100	4	0	0	0	0	100	4

## CONCLUSION

In common with the studies reported by Woods (1976; 1977; 1979) and Ball (1981) this work has emphasized the importance of teachers as agents of selection within the confines of an options system. Because of the research school's location, the composition of its pupil population and the absence of any significant group distinctions along social class lines, I have not focused upon the consequences of social class; which both Woods and Ball have suggested can be of importance in limiting the access to subjects which is possible for the children of working class parents. However, this study has been able to offer insights concerning the importance of three pupil 'identities' in relation to their experience of the subject options process in City Road.

Firstly, in relation to the influences of pupil 'ability', it emerged that, although pupils applied conceptions of their 'ability' as one of their most important choice criteria, teachers acted as "choice mediators" (Woods, 1977) who frequently negotiated changes to the 'provisional' options. Within my three case study forms 65% of pupils changed at least one of their 'provisional' options and 54% of the changes involved a new subject of substantially different academic status to the original choice. Although the majority of individual 'provisional' choices were fulfilled the staff's involvement in negotiating changes was substantial and involved a genuine element of academic selection. Pupils emerged from the options process with curricula of very different academic statuses; for some the chance of any meaningful educational certification was almost certainly gone.

Pupil gender was seen to be a very important element in the negotiation of subject options. As in the case of 'ability', both pupil and teacher perspectives fed into a system which reproduced many of the patterns of subject bias which have been highlighted nationally. The pupils were often influenced by wider societal stereotypes concerning 'male'/'female' roles in the post-school world. Teachers

played a vital role in reinforcing gender-based stereotypes through their challenges to non-traditional choices, which they often interpreted as signs of poor preparation or future "trouble". In a system dominated by the assumptions of male senior staff, female pupils could face particular problems because of the 'masculine' images of certain 'academic' subjects, such as Physics, and the lesser status of 'feminine' subjects, such as Child Care.

Ethnic origin seemed to play little role in the negotiations which I observed in City Road with two notable exceptions. Firstly, some Asian parents were effectively excluded from any real participation because of a language barrier. This was a problem which the school took no action to resolve. Secondly, there seemed to be a tendency to informally challenge West Indian pupils about their choices more often than members of other ethnic groups. This may have reflected an image of West Indian pupils as "troublemakers". However, West Indian pupils often adopted a negotiating strategy which 'distanced' them from the interaction and made it very difficult for the staff to persuade them with arguments. This may explain why, in a system which required reason rather than direction, in contrast to what might have been predicted from work on banding systems (Middleton, 1983; Wright, 1984), the West Indian pupils did not follow predominantly non-academic ("practical") upper school curricula.

Clearly the identities of 'ability', gender and ethnic origin are not exclusive. The data which I could generate from studying three mixed ability form groups does not allow any firm conclusions concerning the interrelations between the different identities, but where a pattern was seen I have tried to note it. For example, concerning the tendency for West Indian girls to choose Biology to the exclusion of other sciences, and the perceived 'conflict' between some girls' appearance and their reported ability in some subjects.

My concern in this chapter, with the broader patterns of experience and

selection within the options process, reflects the general theme of the negotiation of educational opportunity which has guided the construction of this work and complements the previous chapters which focused upon the perspectives and strategies which made up the 'choice' process. The following chapters move beyond the options and into the upper school years. This chapter has been concerned with the differentiation of pupils; a theme continued in the following chapter which looks at the limited polarization in pupil perspectives which emerged as the pupils worked towards external examinations.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. It will be interesting to note how teachers and employers interpret the academic status of 'technology' courses which are currently being proposed as part of a National 'Core' Curriculum (DES, 1987).
2. It remains to be seen whether similar variations in academic standing will emerge between differently written and assessed forms of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).
3. Biology, Religious Education and Art eventually entered pupils for a combined 16-plus examination: this was a forerunner of the GCSE which replaced the GCE and CSE shortly after this research project ended. In the case of Art, however, a minority of pupils were also entered for the existing GCE examination. At the time of the option decisions the adoption of these examinations had not been finalized.
4. Some pupils entered both GCE and CSE. Such 'dual entry' was generally discouraged by most departments but was allowed where the pupil's parents paid for one of the examinations.
5. By definition the pupils on the Double Community Studies option followed only three optional courses. In terms of their timetable, however, this option required the space of two subjects.
6. The quantitative calculations in this work do not always refer to the same number of pupils. Table 4.2 details the level of curriculum placement of each pupil who experienced the whole of the options process in City Road. During the period of this research, however, pupils joined and left the research age grade. Consequently for certain calculations in this thesis the 'options sample' is not the most appropriate basis for calculations. The notes to each table will make clear which sample has been used and a full breakdown of the different samples is included in Appendix 3.
7. There are many works which have attempted to quantify the differences in subject specialization between the genders. One of the most recent summaries of such work is to be found within the research reported by Pratt and his

associates (Pratt, Bloomfield and Seale, 1984).

8. As part of the compulsory 'Design' course, during the fourth and fifth years each pupil had to spend some time in three craft subjects. Coursework from each of these went towards a single CSE Mode III examination grade. The structure of the course required the pupils to change subjects throughout the upper school and there were no reliable figures on the subjects which each pupil eventually took.
9. As I explain in Chapter 6, however, the strategy did not always have positive consequences for the pupil. In classroom situations the same responses, of silence and avoiding eye contact, could heighten the conflict between teacher and pupil because the staff often interpreted them as a challenge to their authority.
10. While individual teachers could require pupils to attend personal detention sessions, the most common and official form of detentions were the "Senior management" ones. These detentions took their name from the level of the staff who supervised the sessions. Senior management detentions represented serious statements about the pupils' behaviour: teachers giving such detentions had to enter a "reason for detention" in the school punishment book and an explanatory letter was sent to the pupil's home which required acknowledgement by a parent or guardian.



## CHAPTER 5: DIFFERENTIATION AND SUBCULTURAL POLARIZATION

### 5.1 PREVIOUS WORK ON DIFFERENTIATION AND SUBCULTURAL POLARIZATION

- a) Towards a model of subcultural polarization: the work of Cohen, Hargreaves, Lacey and Woods
- b) Critical responses to the pro/anti-school model
- c) Differentiation and subcultural polarization: "a cumulative research programme" in the sociology of education

### 5.2 A CONTINUUM OF INVOLVEMENT: A revised model for the analysis of pupil adaptations

- a) Subculture
- b) Revising the pro/anti model as a continuum of involvement

### 5.3 SUBCULTURAL POLARIZATION IN CITY ROAD: Identifying pupil adaptations

- a) The officially communicated school value system and the anticipation of polarization in the upper school
- b) Identifying pupil adaptations
  - i. The complexity of pupil adaptations
  - ii. A limited polarization across a continuum of involvement

### 5.4 THE PROCESSES OF SUBCULTURAL POLARIZATION IN CITY ROAD

- a) Extra-school and school-based influences
- b) Differentiation-polarization and classroom life
  - i. Top and bottom sets
    - A polarization in degrees of involvement
    - The processes of differentiation in academic sets
  - ii. A mixed ability teaching group
    - A continuum of involvement
    - The processes of differentiation in a mixed ability class
- c) A note on the continuum of involvement: pupil adaptations as negotiation and decision-making

## CONCLUSION AND NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

## CHAPTER 5: DIFFERENTIATION AND SUBCULTURAL POLARIZATION

"The third year is a horrible year 'cause they don't seem to know whether they're young or whether they're old. It's a year that's a mess. When they get to the fourth year they seem to either develop exceedingly well, or go off the rails. It seems to happen in the fourth year."

Mr Palmer (Form tutor)

In Chapter 2 I briefly considered some of the pupils' perspectives concerning the criteria which informed their original choices of optional subjects. It was noted that many pupils shared similar expectations of their optional subjects and teachers. Similarly, I have noted that relatively few pupils went into the subject options process with clear academic reputations; in order to give the senior staff some impression of each child's abilities and attitudes the subject departments had been required to write special option assessments. In contrast, by the time my intensive fieldwork came to an end many pupils had very different visions of the school and had established clear reputations, eg. as "a good, hard working lad", "a nice mature girl" or as someone who was "just not interested", "a real troublemaker" (form tutors: field notes).

As the quotation at the top of this page indicates, the staff tended to anticipate these changes during the post-option, upper school years. This chapter is concerned to analyse the extent and nature of the differences in pupil adaptations which emerged as my research age grade moved through their final years of compulsory education in City Road Comprehensive.

The first section of the chapter considers previous work on differentiation and subcultural polarization in state schools. The second section builds upon this and proposes a revised model of pupil adaptations which offers a conceptual framework for the analysis of data from City Road.

The third and fourth sections of this chapter consider the evidence from City Road comprehensive, outlining the nature of the limited polarization in pupil adaptations and exploring the processes of differentiation which lay behind it.

## 5.1 PREVIOUS WORK ON DIFFERENTIATION AND SUBCULTURAL POLARIZATION

Martyn Hammersley, one of the most prolific and stimulating writers on educational ethnography, has recently argued for a change in the role of theory in ethnographic work. Hammersley writes of a "deplorable, and much lamented, gap between theory and empirical work" (Hammersley, 1985: 244). He traces the problem to an approach which focuses primarily upon one or more events and only then applies, and sometimes elaborates, theory in order to explain various aspects of those events. Hammersley argues for a shift in emphasis such that:

"the focus is not on given events, but rather on a particular theoretical idea, and those aspects of any events whose investigation might facilitate the development and testing of that idea"

Martyn Hammersley (1985: 247; original emphasis).

As an example of such an "idea", Hammersley draws upon aspects of published work by Hargreaves (1967), Lacey (1970) and Ball (1981) and attempts a "rational reconstruction" of their findings into a "theory" of differentiation-polarization (Hammersley, 1985: 256).

"This theory claims that if pupils are differentiated according to an academic-behavioural standard, for example by being streamed or banded, their attitudes to that standard will become polarized. In particular, those given the lowest rankings will reject it and the values it embodies. (...)

It is important to recognize that this theory does not offer a complete explanation for pupils' behaviour, or even a complete account of the determinants of school achievement or of 'disruptive' behaviour in classrooms. It claims no more than that, under certain conditions, differentiation will lead to polarization."

Martyn Hammersley (1985: 247)

I shall consider the conception of differentiation-polarization theory in more detail later in this chapter. at this point I wish to emphasize that the pioneering

role which Hammersley accords the work of Hargreaves and Lacey represents a very significant change in the status credited to their analyses of pupil subculture. Indeed, Hammersley himself is one of several writers who have been critical of the 'pro-' and 'anti-school' typology of pupil attitudes and behaviour which arose from those studies (Hammersley and Turner, 1980). Before considering the relationship between my study of City Road and the previous work on differentiation and polarization it is therefore necessary to examine some of the arguments surrounding the interpretation of pupils' perspectives and actions during their secondary school careers.

a) Towards a model of subcultural polarization: the work of Cohen, Hargreaves, Lacey and Woods

Albert Cohen's work on gang delinquency (Cohen, 1955) assumed a position of great importance in earlier debates on the study and interpretation of deviance. Cohen has described his approach as pointing "toward a fusion of the Chicago and anomie traditions" in emphasizing "the role of interaction process in the creation, as well as the transmission, of culturally supported deviant solutions or deviant subcultures" (Cohen, 1968: 152). As this description implies, Cohen's analysis was functionalist in a key respect, ie. he saw the development of a delinquent culture as a means of coping with a problematic situation. Cohen argued that the majority of pupils are initially predisposed to conformity with the official (middle class) values and expectations of the school, however, faced with the lack of means to fulfil the official goals some pupils, in particular urban lower class adolescent males, experience "status frustration". The delinquent culture which they evolve offers a "solution" to such problems "by providing criteria of status which these children can meet" (Cohen, 1955: 121; original emphasis), ie. the tough, hedonistic gang norms which represented an inversion of the official middle class norms of the school.

The "delinquent solution" is therefore achieved through the creation of an

alternative frame of reference to the official middle class one; a solution which Cohen characterized as "subcultural".

"The emergence of these 'group standards' of this shared frame of reference, is the emergence of a new subculture. It is cultural because each actor's participation in this system of norms is influenced by his perception of the same norms in other actors. It is subcultural because the norms are shared only among those actors who stand somehow to profit from them and who find in one another a sympathetic moral climate within which these norms may come to fruition and persist. In this fashion culture is continually being created, re-created and modified wherever individuals sense in one another like needs, generated by like circumstances, not shared generally in the larger social system."

Albert K. Cohen (1955: 65)

In its emphasis upon "like needs", this definition of subculture reflects the influence of functionalist writers such as Talcott Parsons, to whom Cohen acknowledged a "special indebtedness" (1955: Preface). Yet the core of the definition, summarized in the final sentence, persists in current interactionist work. Cohen's analysis was very influential and both Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970) presented their work within the broad framework which he developed.

As part of a co-ordinated research project, based in the University of Manchester, Colin Lacey and David Hargreaves set about analysing individual schools as social systems (Hammersley, 1985: 245). Lacey studied a boys Grammar (Hightown) and Hargreaves a Secondary Modern (Lumley). Both noted a gradual polarization in the pupils' attitudes towards the official school value systems. They argued that teachers routinely differentiated between pupils on certain grounds, especially achievement and behaviour (Lacey, 1970: 57-8). Such differences were institutionalized and amplified by streaming systems which grouped together pupils who shared similar experiences of academic success or failure. Thus, as Cohen had argued, the conditions for the generation of subcultures were created by the school. One subculture, centered around the high streams, accepted the official goals of the institution and strove towards academic success. Another subculture was identified within the lower status classes which rejected the school's value system and

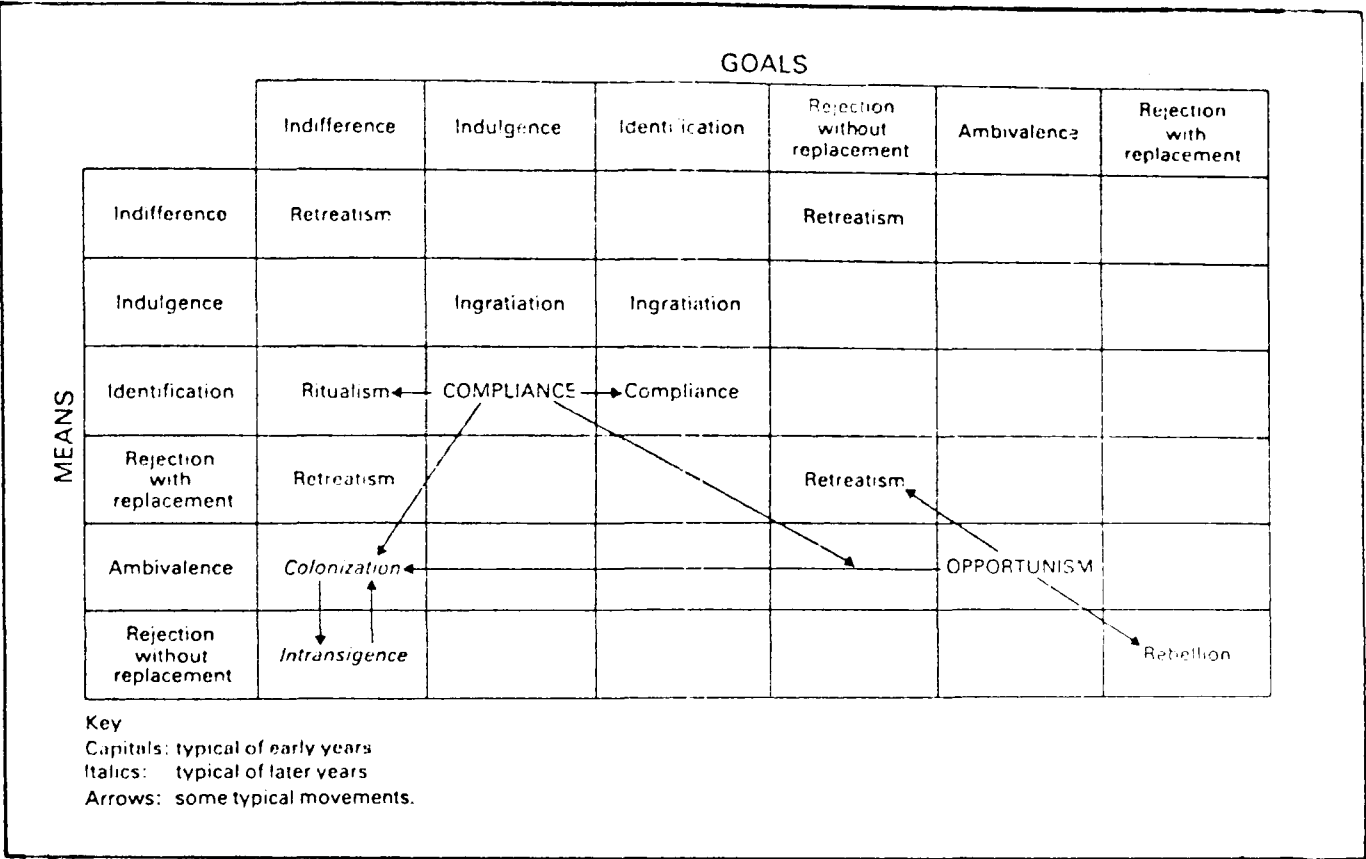


FIGURE 5.1: REVISED TYPOLOGY OF MODES OF ADAPTATION  
IN THE STATE SECONDARY SYSTEM (Woods, 1983; 91)

substituted an oppositional culture. These orientations were referred to as "academic" and "delinquent" by Hargreaves (1967: 162) and as "pro-school" and "anti-school" by Lacey (1970: 187). Both writers used these conceptions as 'ideal types' in the Weberian sense that they were simplifications of reality, abstracted for the purposes of sociological analysis. Both also recognized a variety of influences which shaped the polarization. For example, the anti-school subcultures were not automatic inversions of the officially sanctioned culture; among other factors, they reflected social class components drawn from the local community (Lacey, 1970: 86).

Peter Woods has attempted a refinement of Hargreaves' and Lacey's pro/anti model by generating a more complex typology of "modes of adaptation" (Woods, 1979: 63-83). Woods built upon earlier work (especially by Merton, 1957) to develop a model which focused upon different adaptations to the officially sanctioned goals and means of the school value system. Woods' typologies are summarized in Figure 5.1.

Woods has claimed that the adaptational model "has considerable possibilities" and allows one to "identify various modes of behaviour within the broad pro- and anti-school cultures of Hargreaves and Lacey" (Woods, 1983: 90). Hence Woods presented the "incidence of dominant modes of adaptation" (Figure 5.2) within a broad polarization which echoes that of the earlier studies by leading towards positions of "conformity" and "dissonance". Woods' analysis allows the researcher to distinguish between several different positions which a pupil might adopt in relation to the goals and means which are officially sanctioned by the school, hence, it appears to be a more sophisticated approach than the pro/anti distinction of Hargreaves and Lacey. However, like the earlier conceptions of subcultural polarization, Woods' is an 'ideal type'.

"No school is quite as neatly structured in reality as this. There are all kinds of overlaps, blendings and contradictions."

Peter Woods (1979: 78).

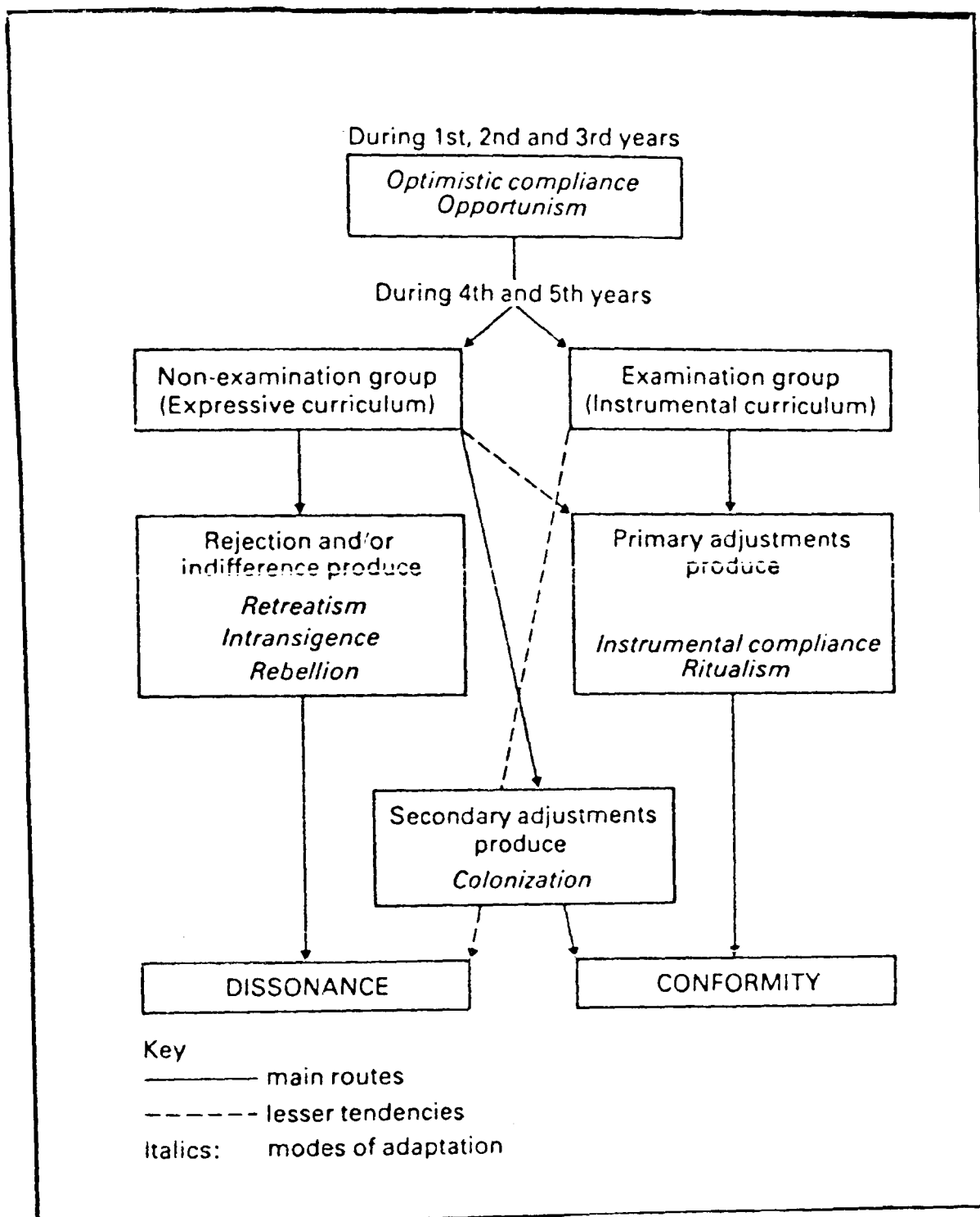


FIGURE 5.2: INCIDENCE OF DOMINANT MODES OF ADAPTATION IN A SECONDARY MODERN SCHOOL (Woods, 1983: 92)



The apparent increase in sophistication which Woods' typology achieved in relation to the earlier pro/anti-school analyses earned it some approval. However, like the analyses of Hargreaves and Lacey, Woods' framework has been criticized by writers who state that it takes too much for granted and imposes simple labels upon very complex pupil perspectives and behaviours. For example, Cathy Bird (1980) has been critical of approaches which assume that pupils perceive a single, consistent set of official demands. Hammersley and Turner (1980) made a similar point and went on to require future work to:

"... begin from concrete description of the orientations of pupils rather than by imposing prior assumptions about what the key features of their environment are and how they react to them."

Martyn Hammersley and Glenn Turner (1980: 35)

Such criticisms formed part of a critique of "normative functionalist" approaches by writers who saw the pro/anti model as a vast over-simplification.

#### b) Critical responses to the pro/anti-school model

Despite explicitly acknowledging the 'ideal' nature of the pro/anti model of subcultural polarization, Hargreaves and Lacey have been criticized for imposing simplistic categories and ignoring the complexity of classroom life. For example:

"It would be obvious, even to the most casual observer of classroom behaviour, that there is no consistent culture for a group of friends. Even the most delinquent pupils will be well behaved in certain circumstances. Teachers do not always invite the same amount of conformity or hostility, and some lessons allow for greater feelings of personal achievement than others."

V.J. Furlong (1976, reprinted 1984: 146; original emphasis)

Furlong's critique infers that Hargreaves and Lacey argued that situational factors were of no importance, that in order to be "consistent" the subcultural perspectives must dictate identical responses to different situations. This interpretation ignores many of the arguments contained in the very works which Furlong cites. For example, in a footnote to the above quotation, as evidence of his

argument, Furlong points to Lacey's description of a pupil called Short. Yet Lacey's whole point in his discussion of that pupil was to emphasize that:

"... the behaviour of even the most representative boy is conditioned by the situation of the moment (...)

... membership of the anti-group did not entail defiance in every gesture and total dedication to upsetting the system every moment of the day."

Colin Lacey (1970: 86-7)

Lacey explicitly argued that a degree of flexibility in the pupils' behaviour was essential if they were to survive school.

"Anyone consistently unwilling or unable to co-operate with the school in a wide variety of situations could not be retained [they would be expelled] (...)

On the other hand, a boy consistently unwilling or unable to operate the norms of the anti-group sub-culture would be bullied or pilloried by his peers beyond normal endurance."

Colin Lacey (1970: 87)

Lacey also noted the importance of exceptional teachers as agents who could bring order to anti-school pupils, or spark misbehaviour in "all except the most extreme pro-school pupils..." (Lacey, 1970: 93). In stressing the complexity of the subcultures Hargreaves made similar points, yet, like Furlong before them, Hammersley and Turner used this as evidence of "the inadequacy of the model" (1980: 30).

"Consider, for example, Hargreaves's comments about 4A at Lumley School, the class with the highest 'commitment to school' and to 'middle-class values':

The boys expressed their concern for academic achievement in their impatience with those subjects they did not intend to take in the CSE, RE and Music in particular were subject to criticism and ridicule. (Hargreaves, 1967, p. 13)

Furthermore,

When they thought the lessons were inadequate in some way, the teachers were criticised. (Ibid., p. 14)

Clearly, the attitudes of 'pro-school pupils', or some of them anyway, are not identical with those of teachers."

Martyn Hammersley and Glenn Turner (1980: 30)

Such criticisms arose from a concern that the pro/anti model was an over-simplification, a point which was overtly acknowledged by Hargreaves and Lacey. To imply that the pro/anti model of subcultural polarization asserts that the attitudes of pro-school pupils are "identical with those of teachers" is to create what Woods (1986,184) has called a "straw person". That these confusions have arisen, reflects the somewhat overly simplistic nature of the terms 'pro-' and 'anti-school'.

The criticisms of the pro/anti model which I have presented here were made in papers which sought to shift the debate towards 'interactionist' rather than 'normative' conceptions of pupil perspectives and behaviours. Furlong (1976) offered the "interaction set" as a means of identifying the constantly changing groupings and agreements which unite different pupils during the school day. This in turn has been criticized as being "stuck at the level of description" by Hammersley and Turner (1980: 45) who offered the notion of "frames" as a means of identifying the moment-to-moment decisions about action which are continually made by pupils.

The apparent contrast between the pro/anti model of Hargreaves and Lacey, and the approaches of critics such as Furlong, Hammersley and Turner lies in the level at which the analyses are presented. Hargreaves and Lacey charted broad patterns of polarization and, in deference to Cohen, often stated their position in normative functionalist terms. Furlong, Hammersley and Turner gave priority to an attempt to interpret moment-to-moment interactions in the classroom, hence, they claim that the pro/anti model is not truly 'interactionist'. However, the approaches are not incompatible. I have already shown that both Hargreaves and Lacey explicitly acknowledged the complexity and variation in pupil adaptations and noted the importance of situational factors. Alternatively, the arguments of Furlong,

Hammersley and Turner do not deny the pro/anti model all validity, rather they place their emphasis at a different level of analysis. Both papers accept that broad patterns of adaptation do exist. For example:

"I am not suggesting that the action of these girls is random: there are patterns and common ways of behaving, as will be shown below. Yet these patterns are much more complex than has been implied by other researchers."

V.J.Furlong (1976, reprinted 1984: 151)

Similarly, having emphasized the complex character of the moment-to-moment decision making which faces pupils, Hammersley and Turner acknowledged the likelihood of reinforcement of certain lines of pupil adaptation.

"One particularly important kind of consequence linked with lines of possible pupil action is identity implications. It is not just social scientists who make generalisations about the typical or general orientations of particular pupils. Both teachers and pupils do this too. (...)

Performing a particular action does not automatically result in the acquisition of a particular reputation, and having a particular reputation does not absolutely determine how others will act towards you. But there is a tendency for each to follow from the other."

Martyn Hammersley and Glenn Turner (1980: 44)

The pro/anti model is therefore an abstraction of a greater degree of generality than the transitory "frames" described by Hammersley and Turner, yet it is an abstraction which reflects a genuine degree of polarization which can occur under certain circumstances. As Hargreaves and Lacey originally emphasized, it is a model which does not deny the complexity of individual adaptations, rather it offers a framework for the analysis of certain school-based processes which impinge upon the pupils' experience of education. It is this level of generality, allowing for complexity of individual adaptations, which seems to lie behind the more recent use of the model by Stephen Ball (1981) and Martyn Hammersley (1985).

c) Differentiation and subcultural polarization: "a cumulative research programme"  
in the sociology of education

I have already noted Martyn Hammersley's recent adoption of the pro/anti model as the basis for a 'theory' which he felt might usefully guide future research (Hammersley, 1985). This application of the model reflects its emphasis upon the broader patterns of pupil adaptations. As Hammersley stated, the theory is not an attempt to deterministically explain all pupil behaviour (1985: 247). Hammersley's adoption of a framework which he had previously criticized seems due in no small way to the work of Stephen Ball (1981).

Ball's account of Beachside comprehensive (1981) is drawn from his postgraduate work at Sussex University; work which was supervised by Colin Lacey (Ball, 1981: xxi). The link is an important one. Although Ball did not set out simply to repeat Lacey's work in a comprehensive setting, his study did share certain interests with the earlier one. For example, Ball focused upon the experiences of pupils within two banded forms and argued that the routine differentiation of pupils by teachers led to the development of polarized subcultures within the pupil body. Like Hargreaves and Lacey, Ball acknowledged the complexity of influences upon pupil action, yet he stated that to a significant degree the actions of the teachers (routinely in class and institutionally through the operation of a banding system) generated polarized pupil subcultures.

It is this continuity between the work of Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball which led Hammersley to describe the studies as representing "a cumulative research programme" in the sociology of education (Hammersley, 1985: 246). A programme which has charted differentiation-polarization in settings which each offered a different set of conditions in terms of the pupil population and/or the form of hierarchical organization of teaching within the school. That is, Hightown Grammar (Lacey, 1970) and Lumley Secondary Modern (Hargreaves, 1967) both 'streamed' their pupils into hierarchically defined classes, but recruited only those who had 'passed' or 'failed' the Eleven-plus examination respectively. Beachside (Ball, 1981) was a

mixed comprehensive school and placed pupils into classes which were grouped under three 'Band' headings.

As I have already noted in previous chapters, Ball also studied members of the first cohort to be taught in mixed ability groups for the majority of lessons during the first three years (he did not follow them beyond the option process). Ball stated that in the mixed ability environment the polarization was much less marked; there was deviance but it was not the oppositional subculture which anti-school pupils in the banded environment had evolved (Ball, 1981: 254).

Ball noted that although teachers still routinely differentiated between certain pupils, the fact that the pupils were taught largely within the mixed ability form group acted against the development of strong subcultural adaptations. In contrast to the banded forms, the mixed ability group offered no ready-made 'labels' to teachers and placed fewer pupils in each class who shared similarly negative images in the eyes of staff. Furthermore, the teachers could physically separate key troublemakers in each group (Ball, 1981: 256-9). Hence, differentiation occurred within each class rather than across the cohort.

"...the mixed ability form group appears to reproduce a microcosm of the banding system, with the processes of differentiation and polarization taking place within each form-group."

Stephen Ball (1981: 273; original emphasis)

The situation which Ball described in the mixed ability forms of his study closely resembled that within the third year forms which I followed in City Road. For example, there were 'troublesome' individuals in my case study forms, but at that time there was no evidence of a coherent set of understandings and agreements between like pupils which might be described as a 'subculture'.

In contrast to Ball (1981), however, my research setting and timescale allowed me to study the pupils beyond the third year, into their final years of compulsory education. In this sense my study offers a continuation of the "cumulative research programme" referred to by Hammersley (1985).

In City Road, as in most urban comprehensives, the post-option years were a period where almost all subjects began a drive toward the external examinations of the fifth year. Consequently some departments attempted to introduce a form of "setting by ability": an upper school trend noted more generally by HMI (1978). Timetable allocations and take-up rates acted against setting in most departments, however, some of the higher status science and humanity subjects were able to introduce some form of setting. Hence, in addition to the compulsory subjects of English and Mathematics, Physics and Geography were able to set across their entire pupil take-up. History and Biology were also able to introduce a limited form of setting within separate timetable blocks.

Given the differentiation inherent in the 'push' towards external examinations, the increase in setting and the often selective nature of staff negotiations over pupil choice (noted in previous chapters) it might be predicted that a form of subcultural polarization would occur in the upper school years at City Road. The form of that polarization was, however, unlikely to follow exactly the lines noted in previous studies: in addition to the different social class, gender and ethnic factors in City Road, in some respects the differentiation itself was of a different kind. For example, in City Road even the pupils who were seen as "the most able" continued to study some lessons in mixed ability groupings and remained members of mixed ability forms.

In terms of Hammersley's reconstructed theory of differentiation and subcultural polarization certain key conditions of the theory were, therefore, open to investigation in City Road. For example, was there any evidence of subcultural polarization in the upper school? If there was, could it be traced to school-based processes of differentiation given the largely mixed ability nature of pupils' lives in City Road? Clearly, some differentiation did occur, during the options and in the setting of some fourth and fifth year subjects, but how, if at all, was it carried over into routine teacher-pupil interactions? These are the principal

questions which are considered in the remainder of this chapter.

In this section I have traced the arguments concerning the validity of the pro/anti-school model of pupil adaptations, noting how critics have emphasized the variety and complexity of life in schools. I also stressed that these observations are not in fact contradictory of the work of Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970), both of whom explicitly acknowledged such points. More recently the model has received increased attention, firstly through the work of Stephen Ball (1981), and subsequently in a reconstructed theory of differentiation and polarization offered as a guide to future research by Martyn Hammersley (1985). Finally I have identified some of the ways in which my own research in City Road Comprehensive might add to the "cumulative research programme" which Hammersley identifies in the work of Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball. Before examining my data on City Road, however, in the following section I wish to make clear my interpretation of certain key concepts which I will use. In so doing I hope to avoid the kind of misinterpretation to which Hargreaves and Lacey have been subject.

## 5.2 A CONTINUUM OF INVOLVEMENT: A revised model for the analysis of pupil adaptations

In this section I wish to make clear the understandings which underlie my use of certain fundamental concepts. The first is the notion of 'subculture', which I want to use in a way which distinguishes between a multitude of unrelated individual adaptations and a series of attitudes and behaviours which are shared and reinforced through interaction between some pupils. I will argue that the latter be understood as a subculture.

The second area for clarification concerns a revised model of subcultural



polarization. In proposing the model at this point in my analysis I have two aims in mind. Firstly, in an attempt to avoid some of the misinterpretations which have characterized the arguments about pro- and anti-school pupils, I wish to restate the model in terms which a) embody the essentials of the model of subcultural polarization whilst b) emphasizing the complexity of the moment-to-moment decisions and actions involved.

My second aim in presenting the revised model at this point is to allow me to deal with the variety and complexity of the data which I generated on this topic. The model was generated by my reading of previous work and my analysis of City Road: its strength is best judged while the evidence is presented and the analysis unfolds.

#### a) Subculture

Throughout the rest of this work I shall assume an understanding of the term 'subculture' as applied in the work on medical student culture by Becker and his colleagues (Hughes, Becker and Geer, 1958; Becker et al 1960 and 1961). These writers isolated several elements which constituted a subculture, ie. a group of two or more people interacting extensively and sharing a common situation (role or problem) which served as the basis for the development of "a body of collective understandings" (Becker et al, 1961: 46-7). These understandings and agreements included shared "goals and values" (often taken-for-granted by members of the group and seen as a 'natural' outlook) and "modes of co-operation", ie. 'rules' develop which govern interaction between members, and between the group and non-members (Hughes, Becker and Geer, 1958).

The understandings and agreements represent a subculture in the sense that they are not 'handed down' to the actors, but are generated within the demands and confines of the institution and may sometimes stand in opposition to certain elements of its 'official' culture.

This understanding retains the core of Cohen's definition. Subculture is still

seen as "continually being created, re-created and modified". However, the definition no longer assumes that the subculture offers a 'solution' to a problem in the functionalist sense. The subculture is likely to reflect the members' situation and will address certain problems of the participants' role in the institution, however, the subculture cannot be assumed to 'solve' anything.

In addition, Becker et al's approach helps to isolate certain defining characteristics which might serve as the basis for the identification and study of different subcultures; ie. the recognition of both an attitudinal (shared goals and values) and a behavioural element (modes of co-operation).

b) Revising the pro/anti model as a continuum of involvement

I have spent much of the previous section arguing that Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970) were innocent of many of the sins attributed to them by critics such as Furlong (1976). The pro/anti model does not deny the complexity of pupil adaptations or the importance of situational factors. Rather, it emphasizes certain similarities and differences in the adaptations of some pupils; adaptations which typically place the pupil either in harmony or conflict with the official school value system. In a revised form, I will apply much the same framework in analysing the adaptations of my case study pupils as they moved through their fourth and fifth years in City Road.

As I hope to demonstrate, this model offers the strongest analytical framework for an understanding of the processes of polarization which occurred in City Road. The model is taken from previous works but restated in a form which caters more easily for the massive complexity of the moment-to-moment, day-to-day decisions and actions which shaped the upper school careers of my case study pupils. It is my belief that this revised model may also facilitate a break from the misinterpretations of the past which have often reflected a too simple application of the 'pro-' and 'anti-school' categories.

Stephen Ball (1981) has already offered a refinement of the pro/anti model by suggesting "a fourfold classification, based on different forms of pupil commitment" (Woods, 1983: 95). Ball outlined four "lines of adaptation" which "may be used to describe the attitudes and behaviour of individual pupils or of particular social groups or friendship groups" (Ball, 1981: 121).

"Pro-school

1. Supportive of the the formal system. These pupils share normatively in a conception of the school as 'education'. (...)
2. Manipulative of the formal system. These pupils use features of the formal social system to their own ends. They have a utilitarian view of school and are concerned mainly with a concrete return on the investment of their time and energy, in terms of getting 'exam passes' and 'qualifications' (...)

Anti-school

1. Passive. These pupils ignore aspects of the formal structure of schooling, as well as teachers' authority in particular areas. They maintain a considerable degree of insularity between their private world and the demands of their teachers without resorting to active intransigence.
2. Rejecting. These pupils reject the goals and the authority of the school..."

Stephen Ball (1981: 120-1)

In outlining these "lines of adaptation" Ball acknowledged that there might be others and made the following qualifying remarks.

"Once again, however, it should be said that not every individual can be neatly fitted into one or other of the categories. There are some pupils who display patterns of behaviour appropriate to more than one category."

Stephen Ball (1981: 121)

This is, of course, exactly the point made by Furlong (1976) in his criticism of Colin Lacey's pro/anti-school typology. It is an observation which I feel must be taken into account in discussions of subcultural polarization. As I will show below, in City Road no pupil could be placed in any one 'category' on all occasions or even in relation to their responses during a single interview. For example, almost every pupil I met could be described as "manipulative of the formal system"

in some sense, and to describe any of my case study pupils as "passive" would be to underestimate their potential for active co-operation and/or rejection in certain circumstances. Although Hargreaves, Lacey, Woods and Ball qualify their arguments to accept such points, their typologies encourage confusion by using concrete-sounding labels in relation to such complex attitudes and behaviours.

Despite the complexity, however, in City Road there were consistent patterns of attitude and behaviour which placed some pupils largely in harmony or conflict with the official school value system (1). The only way of adequately conceiving of the subcultural polarization in City Road, whilst doing justice to the variety and complexity of pupil adaptations, is to abandon the attempt to formulate seemingly concrete 'categories' of pupil adaptation: life in the school was simply not that clear-cut.

Writers such as Woods (1979: 77-9) and Ball (1981: 120-1) have tried to accommodate the variety of pupil adaptations by evolving additional categories. Yet each attempt must remain at the level of an 'ideal type' and seems artificially 'static' in its conceptualization of a pupil's potential to move in any direction (as regards harmony or conflict with the official value system) on any issue and in any action throughout the school day.

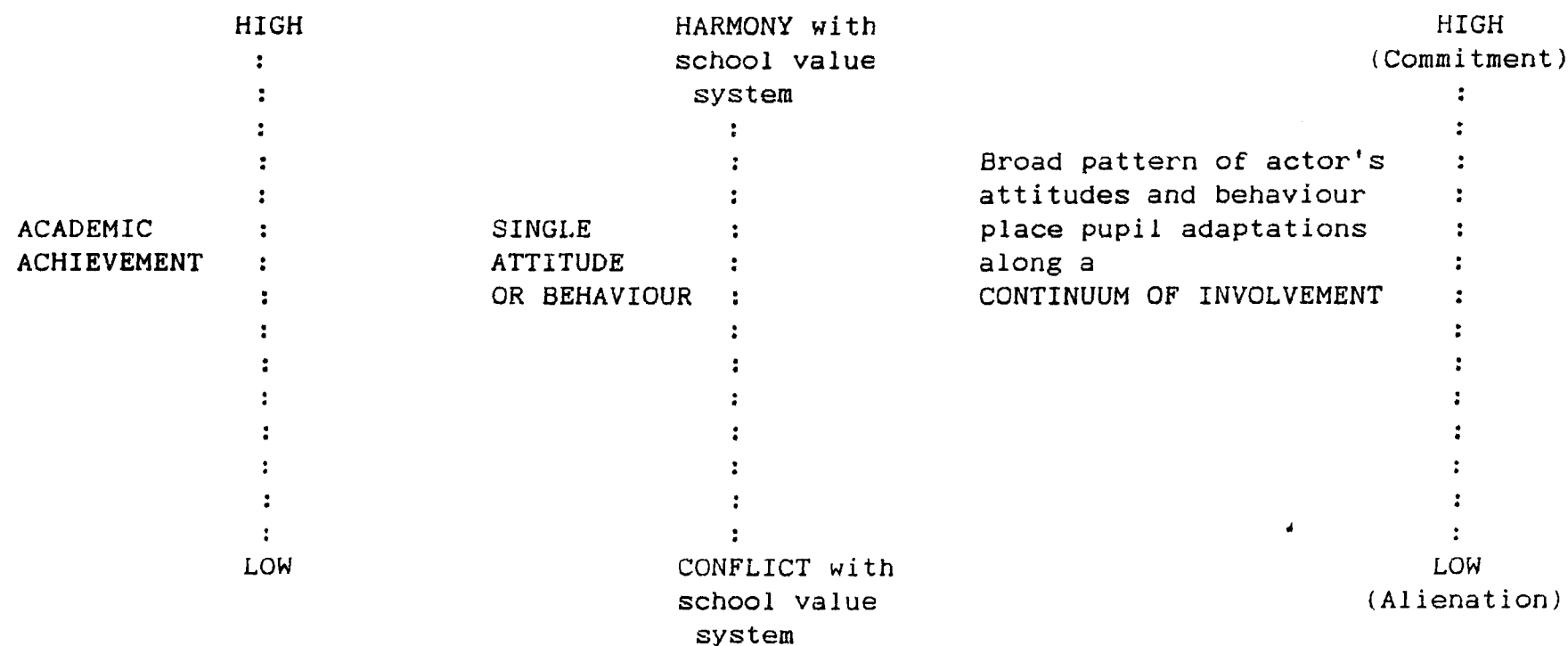
In response to these problems I propose that the framework for the analysis of pupil adaptations should be conceptualized in broader terms. In so doing I wish to restate the pro/anti model in terms drawn from Etzioni's work on the nature of compliance in complex organizations (1961). As Percy Cohen (1968) has noted, an important aspect of Etzioni's analysis is the recognition that:

"...compliance has two aspects: the internal motivation of the actor, and the external pressure exercised by other actors, and by the system in which the actors participate."

Percy S. Cohen (1968: 138)

In different instances either of the internal or external aspects of compliance may become more or less important, but an element of both will always be present to

FIGURE 5.3: A REVISED MODEL OF PUPIL ADAPTATIONS TO THE COMMUNICATED SCHOOL VALUE SYSTEM



Note: Adapted from Lacey (1970: 187) and Ball (1981: 281).

hold certain attitudes, and act in certain ways, which place them largely in harmony or conflict with the official school value system. Individual attitudes or behaviours may occur anywhere along a spectrum of conformity or conflict with the school's official expectations. The distribution of each pupil's attitudes and behaviours is not determined, but neither is it random. The broad patterns of pupil attitudes and behaviours, which even Furlong accepts can be seen (1976: 151), may be used to conceive of the pupil as falling anywhere along a continuum of involvement ranging between commitment to, and alienation from, the goals and values of the official school value system. The processes are essentially the same as those noted in previous works but the model is consciously constructed so as to allow for the variations and complexities of individual actions and attitudes. Hence, the continuum of involvement may be summarized by adapting figures offered by Lacey and Ball (Figure 5.3).

A pupil might move between different degrees of involvement on different occasions and on different issues, yet overall his/her views and actions (attitudes and behaviours) may tend to reflect broadly similar levels of involvement. Hence, it is possible to conceive of a pupil who has a generally high degree of involvement (ie. is committed to key elements of the school value system) yet prizes achievement so much that ineffectual teachers and subjects which offer no prospect of meaningful certification are criticized. Such pupils have already been described by Hargreaves (1967: 13). Similarly, the model allows for pupils with a low degree of involvement (eg. those for whom educational certification is no longer a realistic aim) to act in conflict with official expectations concerning 'effort' whilst still attending some lessons and recognizing teacher authority in certain respects.

This model of a continuum of involvement provides a framework for the analysis of pupil adaptations in City Road. It was not possible to place pupils in neat categories of goals and means (as required by Woods' typology) but it was possible to characterize attitudes and behaviours which showed generally differing degrees of involvement in the school value system. To the extent that some pupils in the upper

some degree. This is an important point and offers a strong basis for the characterization of pupil adaptations. Such a conception allows a role for the actor as both an individual personality and as a participant in a social context (eg. in relation to teacher and peer expectations).

In particular I wish to build upon Etzioni's characterization of "involvement".

"Organizations must continually recruit means if they are to realize their goals. One of the most important of these means is the positive orientation of the participants to the organizational power. Involvement refers to the cathectic-evaluative orientation of an actor to an object, characterized in terms of intensity and direction.

The intensity of involvement ranges from high to low. The direction is either positive or negative. We refer to positive involvement as commitment and to negative involvement as alienation. (The advantage of having a third term, involvement, is that it enables us to refer to the continuum in a neutral way.) Actors can accordingly be placed on an involvement continuum which ranges from a highly negative zone through mild negative and mild positive zones to a highly positive zone."

Amitai Etzioni (1961: 8-9; original emphasis)

Etzioni went on to characterize the "zones of the involvement continuum" as "alienative, for the high alienation zone; moral, for the high commitment zone; and calculative, for the two mild zones" (Etzioni, 1961: 9-10; original emphasis). Ball (1981: 120-1) made reference to these in relation to three of his four "lines of adaptation". However, the fact that Ball identified four categories contrasts with Etzioni's three types of involvement and suggests that the link between the typologies may be somewhat tenuous. Etzioni's notion of an "involvement continuum" is a valuable one but its use in this context must be made explicit.

As authors such as Furlong (1976) and Hammersley and Turner (1980) have emphasized, no pupil action or attitude may be seen as determined by some general orientation to school. The school day, indeed the entire pupil career, is made up of countless decisions concerning possible choices of action and possible positions on questions such as the value of school achievement and conformity with official expectations. Yet despite the variety of possible choices of action, some pupils do

school at City Road tended to move towards a general commitment to, or alienation from, the official school value system, it was possible to highlight a polarization in pupil adaptations within a framework which acknowledges the complexity and variation in the moment-to-moment negotiation of school careers.

As the following data will evidence, it is this formulation of pupil adaptations (as representing varying degrees of involvement) which offers the most satisfactory framework for the analysis of subcultural polarization during the upper school years in City Road.

### 5.3 SUBCULTURAL POLARIZATION IN CITY ROAD: Identifying pupil adaptations

I have already noted that writers such as Bird (1980) and Hammersley and Turner (1980) have challenged the notion that a single set of values and expectations are consistently presented to pupils. As this chapter will demonstrate, informally teacher expectations could vary dramatically between different groups of pupils, even within the same classroom. However, in gatherings such as form periods and year-assemblies, the pupils were consistently presented with a set of expectations concerning appropriate attitudes and behaviours. In this section I will draw upon observational, documentary and interview data, firstly to establish the existence of an 'official' value system within City Road and then to argue that a limited degree of polarization was routinely anticipated by staff in the upper school. In presenting this data my intention is to firmly locate the polarization within the life of the school and to act against the possibility that, like some previous works, my findings might be dismissed as "a methodological artefact" (Meyenn, 1980: 119).

In the final part of this section I will build upon interview data to outline something of the nature of the polarization which emerged within my case-study forms during their fourth year. This will pave the way for an analysis of the processes



behind the polarization which is presented in the subsequent section.

a) The officially communicated school value system and the anticipation of polarization in the upper school

While my research age grade were in their third year I was often told by teachers that "the options could be the making" of certain pupils. However, staff also expected a number of pupils to simply "turn off". The teachers offered several reasons why pupils might develop so well, or so poorly, following the options; some felt that the physical maturation process was an important factor, while others stressed the benefits of splitting pupils from friends who might otherwise have diverted them from their work. In particular, teachers looked to the increased amount of setting as a means of encouraging effort, as the following quotation, from a humanities teacher, illustrates.

"...with the option system they might start to work because there's a certain amount of grading now, and the brighter kids go together, so Rafiq [a "low achiever"] won't be there to be laughed at. (...) So hopefully, with the options they'll settle down and do some work, it does happen."

However, if the options could 'make' a pupil, surely they might also 'break' one? It is interesting to note that while the staff accepted that school processes ("the options" and the limited increase in setting) might lead some pupils to improved efforts, they were not so quick to accept the possible corollary, that they might lead others to reduced efforts. Although an increase in 'trouble' was expected, it was usually seen as an unavoidable consequence of academic failure rather than a reflection of the school's treatment of the pupil. The increasing "disillusionment" (as the staff often referred to it) was something which the school sought to minimize by emphasizing that it was in the interests of all pupils to do their very best during their time at school.

During form periods tutors would periodically address their tutees on the importance of continued effort, however, it was in the 'year-assemblies' that most

formal attempts at motivation were made.

At least once a week the entire age grade would gather in the school hall for a year-assembly. The pupils sat in rows according to their tutor group, with the sexes divided by a narrow walkway between the chairs; girls on the left, boys on the right. These assemblies offered a chance for members of staff to make announcements, concerning clubs or school teams, without having to visit each individual form. The majority of each assembly was usually devoted to an address given by a single member of staff. Occasionally the Headteacher or a deputy would speak, but usually it was Mr Martin (the pastoral Head of Year) who addressed the assemblies involving my research age grade.

Throughout my time in City Road the pupils were encouraged to adopt an approach to school which included a number of central features concerning both effort and demeanour; they should work to the best of their ability, be punctual, polite, and dressed in school uniform. Whatever their ability, pupils were expected to defer to the authority of teachers. These were not the sum of the school's requirements and their day-to-day interpretation and enforcement by staff was by no means universal and unproblematic - indeed much of my analysis rests upon an understanding of the variety and negotiated nature of such interpretations. However, in addresses to the year as a whole these expectations concerning effort, behaviour and demeanour were continually repeated as staff described "the right way" to be. Such expectations represented an officially communicated school value system.

Motivation concerning "the right way" to approach school became an almost constant feature of assemblies in the fourth and fifth year. A perceived polarization of pupil attitudes in relation to those expectations was often reflected in the addresses. The clearest example of this came in the first assembly of the age grade's fifth (and final) year, which was given by the Headteacher. I had anticipated that with the start of a new academic year the assembly would focus upon matters of motivation and indeed this was seen as a 'natural' subject for such an occasion:

"I've known for some while just precisely what I would talk to you about in the first year-assembly. That was very clear, because there's one thing that needs to be uppermost in your minds, to the exclusion of other things during the fifth year... And it is working like mad."

The Head went on to emphasize how much experience he had as a teacher, and then, on the basis of that experience, outlined a number of characteristics which he identified as indicators of future success or failure.

"I'll tell you what some of the signs are. THOSE PEOPLE who keep coming to school, simple and straightforward and uncomplicated. They see they are dressed as they should be, they see they arrive on time. They come to school except when it's just impossible because they're too ill. They're the ones that succeed.

Those people who are SLOPPY in the way they present themselves (...) who are only too happy to find some excuse or another to get out of that day - a bit of a cold and they don't come. They will not succeed. (...)

...it's the right thing to do, to say, 'I will make sure that that homework is done to the very best of my ability.' That is the very least anyone can settle for... 'I shall do it as well as I possibly can'.

Now a few people - no, no, quite a lot of people, will say, 'Not only will I do that as well as I can, but I'm gonna do a lot more. That was SET, but if I do so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so, if I do those, I'm gonna do better than anybody expected'. (...)

[However] there have been times when it's been more important to [some] to waste time, to try and bend the rules. I'm thinking particularly of dress rules. They'd rather let themselves down. BECAUSE THEY'RE THE ONES THAT HAVE TO PAY FOR IT. It's nothing more than irritating to the rest who are working hard. Act silly, fool around, they're the ones that lose. What a shame."

The Head's speech outlined two alternative approaches to the demands of school; one in accordance with the official requirements concerning demeanour and effort (the "ideal client": Becker, 1952), the other in conflict with the norms and values of the school. The elements of each are familiar as those which formed the basis for the pro/anti model of pupil subcultures outlined in previous works. The Head's aim was to identify for pupils the 'correct' way of behaving and to hold out the promise of future success.

"If anyone's sitting in here thinking to themselves, 'I've left it too late'. DON'T."

The Head's speech was exceptional in the clarity with which it distinguished between the 'right' and 'wrong' approaches to the demands of school but its message was repeated throughout the fourth and fifth year. In particular, Mr Martin emphasized that even those who stood no realistic chance of gaining written examination qualifications, could still benefit by not presenting problems for the school.

(From an assembly during the age grade's fourth year)

"[The Head of the fifth year] has sent out this. [Holds up a photocopied sheet of questions] To help him write references. YOU will have to fill in the same thing next year."

[At this point he read out some items from the sheet. They concerned participation in school teams, punctuality and attendance]

"Those are the sort of things employers look for [and] if [the Year Head] doesn't write a reference, then the fifth year, no matter how good they are, they don't stand a chance of getting into further education, or a job, or anything when they leave school. (...)

YOU'VE GOT TWELVE MONTHS. Twelve months from now I will be writing references (...) and anyone who has to be told and told and told, they're obviously being awkward. If they're being awkward, I'll put it in their reference next year."

The Year Head used the school's power over references as a threat in this way on several occasions. As the age-grade neared the end of their compulsory schooling, and the polarization in pupil perspectives became more acute, so the message of the assemblies became more obvious.

(From an assembly during the age grade's fifth year)

"YOU have got two terms left in school. In about four or five weeks time I will start writing references. For some of you, you better start bucking up your ideas or you'll be too late.

THINK ABOUT IT. You've got no choice in the matter. The Government has said you MUST stay in school until you're sixteen. Now if you've GOT to do something you may as well get something out of it. If you have to sit in a restaurant for two hours you may as well have

something to eat, even if it's a bowl of soup. You've GOT to stay in school, so you may as well get something out of it. If it's not academic success, THEN FOR GOD'S SAKE MAKE SURE YOU GET A DECENT REFERENCE. (...) Last week we had eight or ten people at the back with no blazer. I honestly doubt their intelligence. ALL YOU'VE GOT TO DO IS CONFORM."

The final statement of this transcript sums up the school's message for those pupils who were becoming increasingly "disillusioned" with City Road. By a combination of encouragement that success was possible, and threats of the consequences if they clashed with the school, staff continually attempted to minimize what they perceived as the increasingly 'deviant' behaviour of some pupils in the fourth and fifth years.

That the school anticipated, and attempted to contain, subcultural polarization in the post-option years is clear. Some evidence in support of the teachers' expectation of increased 'trouble' in the upper school may be drawn from the school punishment books.

In the previous chapter I drew upon the school record of senior management detentions during the third year. The same source offers a limited test of both differentiation-polarization theory and the expectations of the staff (noted above). It would be inappropriate to compare the three terms of the third year to the four terms of the upper school for which I have this data. Tables 5.1 and 5.2, therefore, offer a comparison between the three terms of the third year and three selected terms from the upper school years, ie. the Spring and Summer terms of the fourth year and the Autumn term of the fifth year. I have omitted the first term of the fourth year since any polarization related to upper school experiences or processes should have become more marked as the pupils moved towards the end of their school careers. For reasons detailed in the following chapter I have not included West Indian pupils in these calculations. West Indian pupils' experience of many school processes was significantly different to that of their peers of other ethnic origins. The importance of ethnicity is examined in the following chapter.

TABLE 5.1: NON-WEST INDIAN PUPILS IN RECEIPT OF AT LEAST ONE SENIOR MANAGEMENT DETENTION DURING THE THIRD YEAR BY GENDER AND CURRICULUM LEVEL

	Eventual Curriculum Level						TOTAL	
	Academic		Split		Non-academic			
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Male	10	6	24	5	40	8	19	19
Female	0	0	12	2	26	5	11	7
<hr/>								
ALL PUPILS	7	6	18	7	33	13	16	26

TABLE 5.2: NON-WEST INDIAN PUPILS IN RECEIPT OF AT LEAST ONE SENIOR MANAGEMENT DETENTION IN THE UPPER SCHOOL (selected terms) BY GENDER AND CURRICULUM LEVEL

	Curriculum Level						TOTAL	
	Academic		Split		Non-academic			
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Male	23	14	43	9	30	6	29	29
Female	8	2	29	5	42	8	24	15
<hr/>								
ALL PUPILS	19	16	37	14	36	14	27	44

Note: Both tables are based on the longitudinal sample.

The detention data offers some support for the teachers' view that pupils increasingly began to "go off the rails" during the fourth and fifth years. A comparison of the total columns shows that a higher proportion of pupils of both sexes appeared in the detention books during the upper school terms; in all, 26 pupils (16% of those present throughout the entire period of my field work) appeared during the third year, compared to 44 pupils (27%) during the three terms in the upper school. This pattern was true for both sexes.

The data is also broken down in terms of the pupils' curriculum placement in the upper school. It is interesting to note that the increase was not merely among those pupils who had negotiated non-academic curricula during the options. Indeed, almost all of the change was due to an increased proportion of 'academic' and split curriculum level pupils appearing in the detention books.

The receipt of senior management detentions is only a very crude guide to teacher-pupil relations. As I will argue in the following chapter, such data may reveal more about the teachers' perceptions than the pupils' 'deviance'. However, the tables do show that an increasing proportion of pupils were identified as acting in conflict with important aspects of the school's official expectations. Also, the data indicates that the changes were not simply reflections of pupils' experiences during the options negotiations, since the greatest increases were among pupils who had negotiated upper school curricula of some academic status.

#### b) Identifying pupil adaptations

As my research age grade completed the fourth year of their secondary education I conducted a series of in-depth interviews with each pupil in two of my original case-study forms (4A and 4C)(2). Each interviewee was seen individually and the interview followed a relatively structured schedule of questions which investigated a wide variety of issues (3).

An important part of the schedule focused upon peer relations and pupil adaptations to the communicated school value system. I sought information on how

the pupil perceived his/her experiences of City Road to that date (including the options process) and probed certain perspectives and actions which might place the pupil in harmony or conflict with elements of the officially communicated school value system. For example, I asked about attitudes to examinations; what type of examination were they to sit (CSE, GCE or 16-plus) and how did they feel about it? Did they think examinations important? Did any of their subjects give homework, if so, how did the pupil feel about it? Had the school got any better or worse during the fourth year? Was City Road "too strict"? Had they ever truanted?

I also asked about the pupils' relationships with staff; did they particularly like/dislike any teachers, if so, why? Did they feel that any pupils were "treated differently" to others?

The interviews generated a great deal of data and, in conjunction with my informal observations around the school, I had anticipated that I would be able to roughly categorize the pupils in relation to Woods (1979) revised typology of modes of adaptation. However, this proved impossible for most pupils. There seemed as many different adaptations as there were pupils. Broad patterns were often visible but in most cases I simply could not unreservedly fit a pupil into any of the categories offered by Woods. In fact Woods has explicitly acknowledged that his categories are simplifications.

[A pupil] "might employ one mode for one section of the school, one subject or one teacher, and another for another. He might have a dominant mode, or a mixture of them. Though I have talked of the 'ritualist' and the 'retreatist' I have talked of them as abstracted people. It is really the modes that we have been discussing. There are bits of all of them in most people."

Peter Woods (1979: 78)

The complexity of the pupils' responses meant that they often reported attitudes and behaviours which might equally qualify them for several different categories. Despite Woods' acknowledgement of the complexities, in City Road the exercise of placing pupils into the categories would have been so arbitrary as to be meaningless.



Although some pupils did seem to approximate the pro- and anti-school typologies offered by writers such as Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball, the complexity of their adaptations often led to striking contradictions between pupils' general orientations and specific attitudes and behaviours. These seemingly contradictory elements were often of such a dramatic nature that the labels 'pro' and 'anti-school' are simply not adequate. This is best demonstrated by examining the responses of one of my case study pupils, an Asian boy in 4A, Arif Aslam. I have already made some mention of Arif in previous chapters; he was seen as a "very intelligent" pupil by staff and, by thoroughly researching the requirements of his chosen profession, he was able to exercise considerable influence in his official option meeting.

i. The complexity of pupil adaptations

During the third year the Year Head told me that Arif was "underachieving" because he fooled around in class and was too talkative. Mr Palmer, Arif's form tutor, also told me that he had received several complaints about Arif's behaviour in lessons. In the upper school, however, Arif began to attract very favourable reports and Palmer cited him as a perfect example of the changes in attitude which could occur following the options.

(From an interview at the end of the fourth year)

"Arif's an OUTSTANDING CHANGE, there's no doubt about that. (...) Both Paul Martin [the Year Head] and I have found that Arif has changed completely. Now last year he was in a gang, with Paul [Dixon], Michael [Cooper] and Ben [Watson], who spent all their time acting and messing around... NOW, he's CHANGED COMPLETELY, he really has. I mean his reports explain it, he's got double A's and B's [for effort and achievement] all over the place. And every member of staff has commented on it. EVERY ONE. That's a VAST change in Arif from his attitude last year."

This kind of description would seem to indicate that, in the eye's of staff, Arif could be described a 'pro-school pupil', yet the complexity of his adaptations went far beyond such a label. Certainly it was the case that Arif was highly

committed to the goal of academic achievement and many of his actions were in harmony with official expectations. However, in certain key respects Arif's commitment to achievement was such that it led to actions and attitudes which were in conflict with other elements of the officially communicated school value system. Perhaps the most serious was his occasional truancy: an act not usually associated with pro-school pupils and something which went directly against the school's emphasis upon attendance at all costs (eg. the Headteacher's speech noted earlier).

DG            "Do you ever take time off from school when you're not ill?"

Arif          "Yeah." [Laughs]

DG            "You do... how regularly?"

Arif          "Not THAT regularly, I only do it when I'm in DESPERATE trouble, like I have to hand in a literature essay. Like, TUESDAY MORNINGS is my most favourite day for taking days off 'cause we've only got GAMES and careers [Guidance] and Technical Graphics. Technical Graphics I can catch up on, and I'm not really bothered about games and careers. (...)

I don't nick off for the sake of nicking off... (...)  
Twice I've done it on a Tuesday morning when I just stayed in my room all morning... My Dad was at work and my Mum didn't realize all morning."

Clearly this kind of act seriously conflicted with the officially communicated school value system, yet in certain respects it reflected how deeply Arif was committed to other official expectations, eg. that work should be in on time and completed to the pupils' best ability. Despite his occasional truancy I would describe Arif as showing a very high degree of involvement in the school value system. Indeed, the style of his truancy was further evidence of his commitment to academic success. For example, he emphasized that he had an academic motive ("I don't nick off for the sake of nicking off") and timed his absence to do least damage to 'academic' subjects; "...we've only got GAMES and careers and Technical Graphics" (my emphasis). Hence, the only examinable subject which he missed on a Tuesday morning was TG, an option of comparatively low academic status, in which he

felt sure he could easily catch-up on missed work.

I have offered detail on Arif because of the clarity with which his example demonstrates the capacity of even the most academically committed pupil to act in conflict with the school's official expectations. Arif was not exceptional in holding certain attitudes, or acting in certain ways, which seemed to contradict the general nature of his involvement with the school value system. Other pupils' adaptations were not so dramatic, but they were no less varied than Arif's. However, this complexity should not obscure the fact that the interviews did reveal a certain degree of polarization in the attitudes of some pupils.

## ii. A limited polarization across a continuum of involvement

I have stated earlier in this work that as the pupils entered the subject options process they applied very similar criteria to their 'provisional' choice of subjects. For example, almost all pupils applied some notion of their ability and interest in different subjects. There was no clear distinction between "group perspectives" in the way described by Woods (1976: 133-6). Furthermore, the mixed ability forms which I followed were made up of a variety of changing friendship groups. Some individual pupils were already 'known' by staff and pupils alike as being "very able" or "troublemakers", but there were virtually no friendship cliques made up exclusively of such pupils, ie. there was very little evidence of subcultural polarization within the forms.

In the fourth year interviews, however, clear differences in some pupils' degree of involvement in the school value system became evident. As I have argued above, the complexity of pupil adaptations meant that no single attitude or behaviour could be taken as indicative of a general orientation to the school. Over the length of the interview, however, it was clear that certain pupils did tend towards a general position of harmony or conflict with the school value system.

This is best illustrated by briefly describing some of the responses of two pupils who tended towards very different degrees of involvement. Rather than use

extreme examples, which might exaggerate some of the differences between adaptations, I have chosen to describe two pupils who were not seen as exceptionally 'good' or 'bad' by their form tutors. Nevertheless, their experiences of, and perspectives on, City Road were markedly different.

Like Arif, Peter Hamilton of 4C tended to be supportive of the school's authority and to show a relatively high degree of commitment to academic goals. Peter valued academic achievement very highly and exhibited a great deal of self motivation. He saw 'O' level and grade 1 CSE examination passes as essential in entering the post-school world and felt that homework naturally complemented the demands of school.

DG            "Do you think it's right that [teachers] expect you to do homework?"

Peter        [Almost incredulous at the question] "Well yeah. 'Cause... well in the classroom you've got the teacher there, say you're not sure of something, you can just stick your hand up and ask the teacher to explain it to you. If you take something home, the teacher's not there and you have to work it out and try and understand it. So they're sort of forcing you to understand it - which is maybe a good thing, try and get you to do it on your own."

Peter said that the school was not "too strict", and felt that teachers used their power legitimately; in answer to the question concerning pupils whom the teachers "treat differently", he reported that it was the pupils who brought disciplinary action upon themselves:

"It's usually if they [the pupils] are causing trouble or making a lot of noise and not getting on with their work."

Peter's motivation to succeed academically led him to attend a "Design club", which was run after school hours, and was officially acknowledged in his receipt of two "Governors' awards": certificates granted to those pupils in each age grade who were judged to have displayed outstanding effort.

"Governors' awards" were not part of the school experience of Denise Burton, a pupil in 4A who in many ways showed a low degree of involvement in the official

school value system. Denise did not actively seek confrontations with staff, she was not "a troublemaker", but she was a frequent truant and saw little of worth in the school. For example, when I asked her about examinations she stated:

"You can't get jobs nowadays, so I don't see what good it is."

Similarly, when I probed her reaction to being sent home because of non-uniform items in her dress, Denise replied simply:

"I liked it. I didn't want to come to school".

A measure of her distance from the school's official expectations was her continued wearing of several items which were clearly 'non-uniform'. Denise was one of several pupils who refused to alter their dress, even after being sent home. The staff saw this as a deliberate challenge:

A form tutor     "They're daring you to send them home again.  
                         They don't mind another day off." (field notes)

By considering a variety of attitudes and behaviours it was sometimes possible to identify pupils with a relatively consistent degree of involvement in the officially communicated school value system. Peter and Denise, for example, are pupils whose answers tended to display very different levels of involvement in the officially sanctioned goals and values of the school: Peter's degree of involvement was generally high, Denise's generally low.

The changes in some of the pupils whom I had observed during the study, plus interview material such as that from Peter and Denise, led me to believe that some form of limited polarization in pupil adaptations was taking place in the upper school. However, it was not possible to operationalize the levels of involvement in more precise terms. Because of the complexity of pupil adaptations, no particular behaviours or attitudes could be identified whose presence/absence might be taken as either necessary or sufficient to define a pupil's adaptation as committed or alienated: Arif was clear proof of this.

Although his teachers praised his achievement and positive attitude towards school, Arif consciously violated a key requirement of the officially communicated school value system. Indeed, the nature of Arif's truancy further emphasized the complexity of the situation. Arif applied school/achievement related criteria in deciding upon the appropriateness of his action. His truancy was a means to an achievement goal which minimized disruption by absenting him from subjects which were of relatively little academic status.

Therefore, although some pupils did seem to display relatively consistent degrees of involvement in the school value system, the complexity of pupil adaptations meant that any attempt to impose a series of descriptive categories upon them would have been an arbitrary matter. Even a behaviour as seemingly clear cut as truancy could not be used as a defining characteristic. It is in this sense that pupil adaptations may be conceived of as a continuum of involvement; as a series of positions in relation to the school value system between which there were no clear, unambiguous divides.

Despite the complexity of pupil adaptations revealed by the structured interviews at the end of the age grade's fourth year, many members of staff were very clear about the changes in attitude which they perceived in the upper school. In addition, as I have already noted, there was some documentary evidence which suggested that an increasing proportion of pupils were identified as acting in ways which conflicted with official expectations (see Tables 5.1 and 5.2). This reflects the fact that the interviews revealed only part of the pupils life in City Road. In order to gain a more complete picture of pupil adaptations in the upper school it was necessary to move inside the classroom, to study in more detail the pupils' interactions with teachers and peers. It was in these interactions that the nature of the limited subcultural polarization within the age grade became most apparent.

#### 5.4 THE PROCESSES OF SUBCULTURAL POLARIZATION IN CITY ROAD

The interaction of many factors affects the quality of life in school. Pupils' identities inside and outside the institution are inextricably linked. However, in considering the factors which lay behind the limited polarization of pupil perspectives in their final years in City Road, it is necessary to distinguish between primarily school-based influences and those whose source lay outside the walls of the institution. This is the only way in which the importance of the school, as an agency involved in the creation of social roles and identities, can be appreciated.

##### a) Extra-school and school-based influences

As my research progressed I came to know some of my case-study pupils very well. I had followed them for approximately eighteen months by the time I carried out the fourth year interviews and, in addition to my own interview and observational data, I had complete access to the school records on each pupil in my research age grade. This enabled me to isolate individual cases where particular factors seemed to lie behind the adoption of certain lines of adaptation.

In a handful of cases pupils had suffered problems concerning a parent or guardian which could lead to absences and a loss of interest in school. Also, the age grade were increasingly mixing with older youths outside the school and this could become the source of an alternative focus to academic interests. For example, Diane Flowers, a girl whom teachers had described as "a model pupil" during the third year, had joined a local "posse", i.e. a large gang of mostly post-school age members. Diane's association with the posse seemed to lead her to a complete and conscious break from many of the officially sanctioned norms and values of the school:

DG            "Do you have any idea what level of examination you might be sitting? Any of your subjects at GCE or CSE?"

Diane        "I'm not bothered no more."

- DG "Why's that?"
- Diane "I just hate school."
- DG "Do you see school as having any USE at all?"
- Diane "A doss."

During the fifth year Diane was taken into the care of the local authority and was eventually moved to another school nearer the residential home. Diane's case illustrated the potentially disastrous influence of what Ball (1978) has termed "contra-cultures", ie, "a group being that exists beyond the boundaries of school membership" whose members "develop and derive a coherent value system which is separate and independent from that of the school". Ball contrasts such a contra-culture with the anti-school "subculture" which is an essentially school-based response to shared problems encountered within the institution (Ball, 1978: 220-8).

As the following chapter will illustrate, a pupil's ethnic origin could also have important consequences for their experience of school and the development of particular perspectives concerning the demands of the pupil role. However, most of the pupils in my case-study forms were not experiencing 'problems' at home, and were neither members of a contra-culture nor an ethnic minority. In addition, as I noted in the first chapter, social class was not a strong distinguishing force within the pupil body. Yet the fourth year interviews indicated that there was a limited, but significant, degree of polarization in the case study pupils' adaptations to the officially communicated school value system. This clearly suggests that school-based factors were of considerable importance; as I have noted, this would support previous work by Hargreaves, Lacey and Ball who have emphasized the importance of school-based differentiation as a factor in subcultural polarization.

Several questions arise from the limited polarization which emerged during the fourth year interviews. Firstly, could the difference in attitudes and actions be seen in classroom situations? If so, were pupils' actions consistent with any group



perspectives which might constitute shared subcultural adaptations? How, if at all, did the pupils' actions and attitudes reflect aspects of their classroom experience? Did the nature of the teaching group (as set or mixed ability) influence pupil adaptations?

These are the questions which I seek to answer in the remainder of this section as I focus on data drawn from teaching situations.

b) Differentiation-polarization and classroom life

As my research age grade entered their fifth year I began a period of intensive classroom observation which was consciously aimed at exploring the possibilities of subcultural polarization in City Road (4). Time and funding restrictions dictated that I finish my detailed field work after the first term of the pupils' fifth year, and so my stay in each classroom was limited. Because of such factors this data must be viewed as exploratory rather than conclusive.

My selection of groups for observation was guided by a number of factors: for example, I could simplify gaining access by approaching teachers with whom I had already established good relationships. Also, I was keen to ensure that the groups I followed included a reasonable proportion of my case-study pupils. However, the most important criterion in the selection of classes for observation was my concern to examine further the differences between pupil adaptations which had arisen during the fourth year interviews. Hence, I chose a mixed ability class from a subject which, because of timetable restrictions, could not introduce setting in the upper school. I also observed the "top" and "bottom" sets of one of the few subjects which could set across the entire age grade (English). I reasoned that if earlier hypotheses concerning differentiation-polarization carried any explanatory power, the differences should be most clear in these two groups. All pupils in the age-grade studied English and since the beginning of the fourth year they had been taught in groups which were "set by ability" (5).

It is impossible to state that each class which I observed was 'representative'

of similar teaching groups in the fifth year, but through my routine conversations with pupils and staff I had no reason to suppose otherwise.

I allowed the pupils two weeks to 'settle back' after the summer vacation and then spent three weeks in each teaching group (an average of nine lessons each).

Having initially introduced myself to the class I would take up a position where I had a clear view of the pupils. I returned to the same chair for each lesson. In the 'O' level English set I was able to observe the classroom 'action' without becoming a part of it, but in the mixed ability group the teacher, and occasionally pupils, would sometimes approach and talk to me during the lesson. This was despite the fact that I had originally asked them to "forget" about my presence in the classroom. In the bottom English set both teacher and pupils would regularly involve me in the action somehow. For example, the teacher would 'confide' his frustrations in me or ask for my impressions of the lesson.

Originally, these responses worried me: 'What was I doing wrong?' 'Why couldn't I distance myself from the interaction in all three groups?' As Becker (1970: 59) has pointed out, however, such differences are a source of information about the groups: the variation in the actors' relations with me reflected fundamental differences in their perception of the lessons. In the 'O' level set all participants were aware of impending examinations and the need to cover the syllabus. The interactions between teacher and pupils were very friendly but followed 'traditional' lines with the teacher directing the lesson from the front of the class. Therefore, as an observer, my role did not include me in the teacher-pupil interaction of the 'O' level set. By contrast, in the bottom English set there were less than half as many pupils. Here the atmosphere was very informal and the lessons were only 'loosely' structured, with the teacher circulating between groups of pupils. Given such informal conditions both the teacher and his pupils seemed naturally to involve me as part of the life of the group.

In the mixed ability lessons the informal structure of teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions was differentiated within the class, and this allowed both

the teacher and some of his pupils, the 'freedom' to talk with me during lessons.

In order to fully appreciate the nature of the interactions in each of these teaching groups it is necessary to deal with the set and mixed ability classes in turn.

#### i. Top and bottom sets

##### A polarization in degrees of involvement

Life in the top and bottom English sets contrasted very strongly. The two groups often mirrored the patterns of behaviour which Stephen Ball has described in banded second year forms, ie. activity in the top set was mostly "task-oriented", ie. "directed towards some end, or involving some endeavour, defined as appropriate by the teacher" (Ball, 1981: 26). In the bottom set, 'work', ie. the tasks set by the teacher, was largely something to be avoided and the pupils had developed a battery of strategies which negotiated less demanding requirements. For example, pupils in the lower set would spend lengthy periods talking in small groups or moving around the room to 'borrow' pieces of equipment. The following extract is taken from my field notes and conveys something of the pupils' approach to 'work'.

The class was required to write a report, on an "Unknown Planet", from the perspective of an explorer writing to his/her Government.

Several pupils spent time drawing maps and views of the planet from space. This allowed them to hold conversations while still meeting the basic demands of the task. By drawing, rather than writing, they also avoided elements of 'English' which gave them difficulty (spelling, grammar, handwriting etc). (...)

At [one point, the teacher] realized that Carol Barber was sitting staring blankly into space. He caught her attention and looked at her quizzically:

Carol "I can't think of anything else to write."

Teacher "Have you given the planet a name? Drawn a map of the landing place?"

Carol "Yeah. That's it". [Holds up a piece of paper]

Teacher "What was it like travelling there? What people did you meet? What did they look like? What did they eat? What sort of plants were there?"

- Carol "I CAN'T PUT ONE THING THEN GO TO ANOTHER."
- Teacher "YOU CAN. You can do all sorts of things.  
You can put little headings... 'People', 'Weather' -  
What weather did they have? Were their days the same  
length as ours or were they longer or shorter?"
- Carol "I JUST GOT THERE. I don't know about all that."
- Teacher "No. You haven't JUST got there, you've BEEN there and  
COME BACK."
- Carol "I mean, I'm writing as if I just got there, what I saw -"
- Teacher "- Oh I see, you're writing a diary. Well what did you  
find then? What did they live in, what sort of houses?  
What was the City like? Do a sketch."
- Carol "I aint got enough paper."
- Teacher "You'd think of any excuse."

The extract shows not only how the pupils took what was meant to be a starting point (drawing maps) and turned it into the focus of the lesson, but also the strength of their resistance to the teacher's attempts to get them writing. Whereas in the top set the teacher and pupils shared the same understanding of the overall aim of the lesson (to get through the work and pass examinations), in the bottom set the teacher and pupils had conflicting aims. This was reflected in the conflictual nature of many teacher-pupil interactions in the lower set. For example, at one point in the extract above, Carol and the teacher shouted at each other. This pattern of 'harmony' and 'conflict' with the official definition of the lesson in the top and bottom sets respectively, could also be seen (or rather heard) in the structure of pupil-pupil talk during lessons.

Top set pupils generally spoke with each other when there were 'natural' breaks in the lesson. For example, when the teacher gave out paper, left the room without giving them work to do, or signalled that it was time to start "packing away". In the bottom set the level of noise often crept up as the lesson went on, regardless of the task in hand, forcing the teacher to call for quiet. It was not that pupils in the top set did not gossip, but that they confined their gossiping to

points where they were not in competition with the teacher: I went through the tape recording of one top set lesson and found that about 25% of the 55 minute lesson was taken up with pupil-pupil talk, yet because the 'noise' had taken its cue from the structure of the lesson itself, the overall impression was of a very orderly and even 'quiet' group of pupils.

Pupil-pupil relations within the English sets also exhibited significantly different characters. In the top set the pupils would often joke with each other in a supportive, 'warm' way. In the bottom set humour was rooted in attacks upon a pupil's competence, indeed, aggression was a major factor in pupil relations in that set.

#### From top set field notes

[Earlier in the lesson the set had discovered that one of them, Mohammed Abid, had written a fifty page literature essay]  
The knowledge of Mohammed's work fed back into the lesson in the form of a joke - the teacher, in detailing examination techniques, stated:

"IT'S QUALITY NOT QUANTITY".

Paul Dixon looked up from his book grinning and called this to his peer's attention,

"Mohammed."

Several pupils, including Mohammed, laughed at this.

There was no hostility in the remark... the essay and effort put into it were held in awe rather than contempt.

#### From bottom set transcripts

Steve Harper [To the room in general] "Ay, whats the question about 'forenames'?"

Teacher "What's what?"

Jim Bailey [To Steve] "DUNCE."

Steve [To Jim] "Oo-er, you're the dunce."

Teacher "Why weren't you listening Steven?"

Steve "I WAS LISTENING."

Teacher "Well I explained what they were."

Steve "I WAS listening."

Barry Flemming [Laughs at Steve]

Steve [Angrily to Barry] "I WAS."

It is clear therefore that many elements of subcultural polarization, similar to those reported in previous works, were found in the top and bottom English sets in City Road. The pupils demonstrated contrasting approaches to the demands of the lesson, ie. their shared goals and values reflected a similar orientation to the official school value system. For example, those in the top group complemented the official structure of the lesson while the bottom group often conflicted with it. Similarly, the pupils' relationships with their peers and teachers followed very different lines, with support and co-operation in the top set rather than the often aggressive and conflictual atmosphere of the bottom one. In other words the sets evidenced a commitment to differing goals and values and showed contrasting modes of co-operation.

It should not be assumed that all pupils in each group acted exactly alike, however, it was significant that the contrasting approaches to lessons, which typified each set, were enforced within each group. For example, a pupil showing signs of commitment to academic goals in the lower set, say by volunteering too many answers, might be called a "creep" and make themselves targets for sustained verbal abuse throughout the lesson. Similarly, someone "messaging" with a friend in the top set would often be criticized by their peers in 'stage whispers' to the rest of the set which condemned them as "stupid" (field notes).

Several factors must be taken into account if we are to understand the processes which lay behind the development of such contrasting reactions to the demands of school. The first of these concerns the creation and character of the teaching groups themselves.

### The processes of differentiation in academic sets

To some degree the differing levels of commitment/alienation exhibited by the groups was defined by the criteria which the subject department applied in creating them. Setting ensured that in English lessons the top and bottom pupils would interact only with peers who experienced similar problems in terms of their role within the school, ie. the 'classic' conditions for subcultural polarization. Those in the top set had already experienced some degree of academic success, while those in the bottom set had experienced conflict with the school's expectations concerning behaviour and/or achievement.

These differences were clear when one compared the curriculum levels which the pupils in each set had negotiated during the options process. All thirteen members of the bottom set had received an upper school options curriculum of a non-academic (practical) nature. By contrast, of the thirty-four pupils originally placed in the top set all but four had negotiated 'academic' upper school options curricula; the exceptions being of split curriculum level. Hence the level of 'trouble' in the bottom set was in many ways written into the class by the criteria which decided it's membership.

#### The Head of

##### English

"We considered VERY carefully who we placed in the bottom group. Because some had done BADLY enough on the [third year] exam to merit inclusion in the bottom group but we felt it would not be sufficiently challenging for them, and they would be demoralized by removal from the mainstream.

So only exceptional cases, mainly very poor behaviour, attitude... truancy or just inability to cope with ANY simple work. And a very small group (...) was selected for the bottom end."

As this statement demonstrates, the pupils in the bottom set were seen as 'no-hopers'. While some peers of equally low achievement had been spared the group, the members of the bottom set were seen as being past help.

The same judgements, concerning pupils' future careers in school, which had led to their placement in the top and bottom sets also led to differences in the

teachers' expectations and treatment of those groups. Each top set lesson which I observed began with a motivational speech from the teacher, focusing upon the need for continued effort and the importance of examination results. This added to the sense of urgency which existed in the group. Although they had only just entered the fifth year, there was a feeling that the external examinations were very close. Each lesson and "assignment" (an essay to be written at home) was part of a complex schedule which derived from the examination syllabus and structured the pupils' work load well into the future.

The following extract is from the teacher's address at the beginning of a top set lesson and illustrates the sense of urgency which the academic requirements fostered in the group.

"I'll just explain about the assignments. You've got two to hand in, obviously I want those as soon as possible, they're overdue now... The poetry and the Shakespeare. (...)

I explained why it was important to do the Shakespeare if you'd not done as well as you might expect first time. You do in fact HAVE to submit an essay on Shakespeare for your course, so therefore it's doubly important that you did well second time around."

This contrasts strongly with the organization and expectations of the bottom English set where homework was never given and lessons rarely followed the same theme for more than two teaching periods. The teacher told me that he tried to help the pupils "get something out of it" by focusing upon the uses of English in the post-school world, eg. by familiarizing them with the language of official forms. However, lessons were often disrupted through the teacher's other commitments within the school or the intrusion of pupils from other English sets. This final point was significant: if a group had to be split up for a time because of a teacher's absence, the bottom set was seen as a natural place to send many of the pupils, while the top set never received any. Hence, the organization of bottom set lessons was often on a precarious day-to-day basis.

Given the contrast between the long and short term concerns which lay behind the teachers' organization and structure of lessons in the top and bottom sets, it



is hardly surprising that the pupils' own concerns focused upon similar horizons, ie, gaining examination qualifications (top set-long term) and avoiding work and "messaging" (bottom set-short term).

The teachers' judgements concerning the pupils' likely future school careers and achievements led to actions which seemed to reinforce the contrasting levels of academic involvement within the sets. The views which pupils in the bottom set expressed in interviews, and their actions in lessons, often conflicted with the official expectations of the school which were communicated to them in form periods and assemblies. Yet their attitudes and behaviours often complemented the school's informal day-to-day expectations of them, which were communicated in routine interactions with teachers. For example, I noted earlier that regular attendance was held up as a basic requirement of the pupil role (eg. the Head's speech at the start of the fifth year). Although such expectations were communicated to all pupils in 'public' gatherings such as assemblies, in the teaching situation the school actually expected the opposite of some pupils; in the bottom set a high level of truancy was routinely accepted. The staff explained this by reference to the "disillusionment" of the pupils, yet the teachers' anticipation of truancy was constantly brought to the set's attention. Indeed, it was often cause for comment when certain pupils were present.

Teacher [Taking the register] "Bailey?"

Jim Bailey "Sir."

Teacher "Blimey, look what the wind blew in. Careful Jim you're in danger of being a regular attender".

Comments such as this were always said in a light-hearted fashion, but their effect was to make clear that for pupils in the bottom group a somewhat different set of expectations applied. Robert Jeffcoate has recently reported similar expectations of a bottom English set in a Northern comprehensive (Jeffcoate, 1987).

The routine understandings and agreements of pupils in the top and bottom set

reflected polarized positions in relation to the officially communicated norms and values of the school. However, these positions were in accordance with the informal expectations which the teachers held of each set and were reinforced through the routine teacher-pupil interactions in the teaching group. These findings support the basic hypothesis of differentiation-polarization theory in that the department, by overtly separating pupils in relation to an academic-behavioural standard, supplied the means by which both teachers and pupils could develop separate and conflicting expectations about the pupil role. The result of this differentiation could be seen clearly in the contrasting nature of life in the top and bottom sets.

The evidence of these sets would seem to indicate that there was subcultural polarization in City Road but it should be remembered that the pupils who experienced the English sets spent much of their time in school in mixed ability environments (in their form groups and in subjects which could not set). Furthermore, pupils who displayed generally high or low degrees of academic involvement during the fourth year interviews had not always experienced a top or bottom set within the school. It is therefore necessary to identify any further means by which subcultural polarization might have been generated and reinforced within a mixed ability teaching environment.

## ii. A mixed ability teaching group

### A continuum of involvement

Although the top and bottom English sets differed in many ways they did share one characteristic, ie. a strong sense of group identity. Hence, the 'O' level group protested with cries of "Ohh" and "Why sir?", when they were told that some pupils from the "intermediate" set would join them for a reading to be given by a visiting poet. Similarly, when pupils from one of the CSE groups joined the bottom set for a lesson (due to a teacher's absence) the newcomers were made unwelcome with warnings such as "Sit down and shut up." There was no such 'group identity' in the mixed ability class, a fact which reflected the internal differentiation within the

group.

This class was made up of pupils from the entire range of 'ability' in the age grade and included members of both the top and bottom English sets. Pupils were in this classroom because they had chosen the subject from the same timetable block in the option pattern (see Chapter 2). The lesson was Technical Graphics (TG) which, although an overwhelmingly 'male' craft subject, tended to receive pupils of very different abilities, particularly in the final block of the option pattern which offered few 'academic' choices. Hence, TG provided an opportunity to observe teacher and pupils in a truly 'mixed' academic environment.

As in the English sets, in TG most pupils had established regular seats in the classroom. However, whereas in English lessons pupils often had social contact with peers who sat across the room from them (borrowing equipment or talking when the teacher was absent), pupils in TG rarely spoke with anyone who was not in their immediate vicinity. They had ample opportunity to do so, not only during 'natural' breaks in the lesson (as in the top English set), but throughout their time in the room, since they were allowed to move away from their chairs to collect equipment from cupboards or borrow from their peers. There was a steady 'hum' of conversation throughout the lessons but because of the lack of extended peer friendship ties within the class, there was never any shouting across the room.

The double-desks were arranged back-to-back in groups of two, so that four pupils could sit together, the two on one desk facing the others. This allowed pupils to cluster together in small friendship groups around the same desks. Most of these groups were made up of between two and four pupils. However, one group was regularly joined by a fifth pupil, who sat at the end of a desk, and on occasions other cliques also 'gained' an extra pupil for a single lesson. Despite these occasional changes between lessons, a core of pupils could be identified in a number of friendship groups. The pupils within each such friendship group tended to adopt similar approaches to the demands of the lesson. The approaches of my case study pupils often reflected differences in commitment which had been highlighted in the

fourth year interviews.

High degrees of academic commitment: Three groups (nine core pupils in all) worked very hard. All the pupils involved had negotiated 'academic' upper school curricula during the options process and although they held conversations during the lesson, they rarely left their seats or looked away from their work. Consequently they were making excellent progress with their worksheets, and even held informal competitions within the group to see who could finish a particular exercise first. Five of these pupils were members of the top English set, and each of the groups displayed a high degree of commitment to academic goals. For example, on several occasions I saw three of the pupils continue working a full two minutes after the teacher had announced that they should "Start packing away" for morning recess.

Moderate degrees of involvement: Two groupings (usually involving eight pupils) could be described in this way. One group, of four pupils, was equally divided between those of academic and split curriculum levels. During lessons these boys would often become engaged in heated arguments which usually brought about reprimands from the teacher. A fifth pupil, Charley Thompson (a West Indian), would sometimes sit with this group but he tended to work alone on a separate table and only join the others occasionally, when he had something to add to the conversation or was having difficulty with his work. Typically this group did more talking than drawing and they were frequently being told off. In an attempt to stem rising noise levels, the teacher would sometimes tell a pupil to move to an isolated desk. This sanction was only ever applied to members of this group. These pupils were frequently seen as a "problem" by the teacher, however, their attitude to work could vary dramatically from one lesson to another. Although they did not display the commitment of some of their peers, neither were the boys in this group 'alienated' from academic goals in the aggressive style of the bottom English set.

A further group of three pupils worked steadily at their different tasks but their conversations seemed equally important and during my three weeks of observation I rarely saw them complete any exercise. These pupils could be described

as 'time-servers'. They were rarely 'in trouble', but never stood out in terms of effort or achievement.

Isolates and 'alienated' pupils: Five pupils, including the only girl in the class, were isolates inasmuch as they showed no consistent friendship ties within the group. One of them (Kevin Tailby) was from the bottom English set. Kevin did not have a particular reputation for aggressiveness but he did take part in some of the "messaging" which typified the pupils' behaviour in that set. He did not display that kind of behaviour in TG, but he did respond to the lesson in a way which reflected a common element in the conflictual subculture of his English set, ie. he became a frequent truant.

Truancy was one of the few elements of the bottom set subculture which the pupils could easily transfer to a mixed ability group. As Ball has noted (1981: 257) their lack of numbers in mixed ability classes restricts such pupils' scope for the kind of conflictual actions which typified their relationship to staff and peers in the bottom English set.

When I spoke to pupils in the bottom English set they reported that they liked the lesson; it was "a good laugh", they could "muck about" and the teacher was "alright - he's not too strict". However, in lessons where they were often isolated, such as TG, there were few opportunities to "muck about" and the classes were therefore condemned as "boring". Frequently the pupils' response was to utilize a familiar aspect of the subculture of the English set (truancy) which could be used irrespective of classroom conditions. Hence, I saw Kevin in English much more often than TG. Similarly, interviews with other members of the bottom English set suggested that their truancy was most frequent in lessons where the chances of "mucking about" were limited.

#### The processes of differentiation in a mixed ability class

The pupils in the mixed ability classroom offered examples of adaptations across the entire continuum of involvement, from the highly committed to the

alienated and isolated. The majority of the TG pupils sat in regular friendship groupings which clearly acted to reinforce similar lines of adaptation in the participating pupils (the importance of such groupings is considered further below). The teacher also played an active part in the differentiation within the classroom.

The wide range of 'abilities' which made up the TG class was seen as something of a problem by the teacher.

"Have you been looking at anything like Maths or English? 'Cause one of my biggest problems is that these are different abilities, whereas in subjects like Maths they're set, so they're all the same.

Now in here there are some who can storm through it, and others who can't read English... Makes a big difference.

(...) What I've done this year, for the first time, they've all got a copy of this in their folder [a sheet detailing the 12 sections of the syllabus and questions to be attempted on each]. They're supposed to work through it at their own pace, but the trouble is some are down here [item 10], others are still here [item 1] and have been since September. Now come the exam, they'll still only be to here [item 5], and yet they're expected to know all of this [12 items]." (field notes)

Despite his conscious recognition of the greater needs of some pupils, the teacher devoted most of his attention to the demands of the 'able', highly committed pupils. The teacher spent the majority of each lesson walking about the room, looking at pupils' work and helping them out. Those pupils in the hard-working academically committed groups would typically receive several visits in each lesson. The teacher would often sit with them at their desk and demonstrate how to solve any problems they encountered.

This level of attention and shared problem solving was rarely available to other, less committed pupils: they usually had to attract the teacher's attention and wait if they needed help. For example, the following extract from my field notes (written during the lesson) concerns an 'able' member of a highly committed group (Arif Aslam) and a member of a less committed group which displayed only moderate

degrees of involvement and was often in trouble (Dean Marsden). The latter was seen as being of 'average' ability.

9.35am Marsden [who has been moved to a seat on his own to stop him talking to his mates] has his hand in the air in the far corner of the room. He stands, goes over to his usual seat for an instrument, then returns. His hand is still in the air.

9.37am [The teacher] stands and leaves the pupil he is presently seeing [Simon Evans: an 'able', highly committed pupil].

Marsden calls, "SIR".

Teacher: "Just a minute".

The teacher fetches a paper for Evans, then moves to Arif who is sitting nearby.

Marsden protests, "SIR", but gets the same reply,

"Just a minute".

The teacher's responses to the demands of pupils in different friendship groups within the class reflected a general differentiation in the nature of teacher-pupil relations between those groups. For example, although the teacher was often to be found sharing a joke with the pupils, this was usually with members of the highly committed groups. This is not the first time that research has shown consistent differences in the treatment of pupils who share the same room, for example, a similar pattern of interactions has been found in Primary classrooms where the pupils closest to the teachers' notion of the 'ideal' client received more attention than their class-mates (Sharp and Green, 1975).

Therefore, patterns of differentiation and subcultural polarization similar to those seen by comparing life in the top and bottom English sets could also be identified within the mixed ability TG class. The patterns of harmony and conflict with the official definition of the lesson were reflected in the pupil-pupil and pupil-teacher interactions within the class. While the more committed pupils received a lot of informal advice and praise from the teacher, the moderately involved and more alienated pupils usually had to seek out help - although they were

often content to talk with friends or absent themselves from lessons altogether. The teacher's unconscious differentiation between groups of pupils was facilitated by, and in turn reinforced, the informal divisions between peer friendship groups within the lesson.

The friendship groups noted above did not cease to exist when the pupils left TG. Many of the groups described in my field notes reappeared in interview and questionnaire responses as part of larger networks of peer friendships which could extend across the age-grade (6). The structure of these friendship groups was significant, for they were a further influence which took the polarization of pupil attitudes beyond the sphere of individual adaptations, to a point where some could legitimately be described as 'subcultural'.

The subcultures of high commitment and alienation, which were so clearly seen in the English sets, reflected crucial elements of those pupils' attitudes and behaviour throughout the school. Attitudes and behaviour which were largely in harmony or conflict with the school's formal expectations and which influenced the nature of pupils' interactions with teachers and peers in a variety of settings. As I have shown above, some pupils had similar 'labels' in set and mixed ability environments alike, in addition, they interacted with peers who shared their experiences and reinforced their perception of the school. Hence, the members of the top English set who took TG appeared in highly committed groups despite the variety of peers in the classroom.

Alternatively, there were pupils who had negotiated access to some academic subjects yet were not seen as "high flyers" by staff. Hence, in TG while some pupils of an academic curriculum placement had excellent teacher-pupil relations and sat with similarly motivated pupils, others of academic and split curriculum levels displayed only moderate involvement in the formal demands of the lesson: they received less positive attention from the teacher and often sat chatting among themselves.



Pupils who had emerged from the options process with an overwhelmingly non-academic ('practical') curriculum often shared the same room in the upper school, eg. in the 'sink' subjects such as Applied Science and Double Community Studies or in the lower sets of subjects like English and Mathematics. When in the majority (eg. bottom set English lessons) these pupils displayed shared agreements concerning goals, values and modes of co-operation. However, in mixed ability settings, where they were a minority, such pupils took little active part in the lesson. For example, on the occasions that Kevin Tailby attended TG lessons he typically sat alone and had little contact with teacher or peers. It was in such situations that his lack of involvement in the school value system (alienation) was perhaps most graphically illustrated.

c) A note on the continuum of involvement: pupil adaptations as negotiation and decision-making

In this chapter I have made a number of points concerning the adaptations of the case study pupils, perhaps the most important is the need to recognize the complexity of pupil adaptations. The attitudes and behaviours of individual pupils are not determined, either by their past experiences or by others' present expectations of them. However, attitudes and behaviours are located in a social context, consequently the pupil's past career in education and the expectations which his/her peers and teachers hold can be of crucial importance. I have argued that in some cases a degree of consistency in the attitudes and behaviours of an actor can be used to indicate their degree of involvement in the official school value system.

In key respects the degrees of involvement were negotiated. The pupil's experiences in the options system and the classroom could be crucial factors in their movement towards positions of commitment to, or alienation from, the official value system but neither were the whole story. Even in apparently extreme examples

of academic commitment, the actor's capacity as a decision-maker offered an opportunity for independent evaluation and action which might occur anywhere along a spectrum bounded by harmony and conflict with the school value system. Hence, Arif Aslam, a highly motivated and academically committed pupil, applied the same notions of subject status which senior staff had used in option meetings to his decisions concerning the merits of truancy on a Tuesday morning (see above: Section 5.3:b).

Certain groups of pupils displayed common understandings and agreements concerning the demands of the lesson and the pupil role. In the mixed ability class the core members of certain friendship groups evidenced shared goals, values and modes of co-operation. The contrasting natures of the polarized subcultural adaptations were most evident in the top and bottom English sets. These subcultural understandings and agreements were actively created and modified through teacher-pupil and peer interaction. In their moment-to-moment, day-to-day attitudes and actions even the most highly committed and alienated pupils did not simply reflect or invert official expectations and judgements. That the subcultures of commitment and alienation did largely complement and conflict with the official value system has been established above, however, the difference was one of degree; neither completely accepted or rejected the official expectations which they faced.

This is an important point. Too often the language of reaction-formation and status frustration, used by earlier writers such as Cohen (1955), Hargreaves (1967) and Lacey (1970), has been interpreted by critics as inferring that some pupils completely accept the official norms and values whilst others reject them. In such critiques the pupil is no longer seen as a dynamic actor with the potential to make his/her own decisions, but rather becomes a reflection (positive or negative) of others' views. I have argued that the committed and alienated pupils were influenced by others' expectations, yet the subcultures which were evident in the top and bottom English sets were far from simple and neither could be described as a mere reflection/inversion of official expectations. For example, even the most committed pupils found some of the teachers' expectations unrealistic.

Janet Nelson "The problem with English is, I don't think they realize that you get homework in other subjects. They think that theirs is the ONLY homework, and THEIRS should be on time automatically. I don't think they realize that you get quite a bit from all the other subjects, what with quite a lot of people in the class doing 'O' levels in [other departments]. So I do think they should cut it down a bit."

---

Julie Bexson "Mrs (...), she thinks everyone's got to be perfect all the time [laughs]. 'Sit down. Do the work. Then do the experiment, then sit down and write it up'. She thinks because we're an 'O' level group for Biology, she thinks, you know, you've got to be brilliant.

Like, [the English teacher] he says, 'You're in an 'O' level group, you should be PERFECT. You should be doing your work, you shouldn't be doing anything wrong'. But you don't - just because you're in an 'O' level group, YOU'RE STILL NORMAL AREN'T YOU? You're not anything better."

Both Janet and Julie were highly committed to the goals of achievement, yet both remained independent actors, capable of querying teachers' expectations concerning appropriate work-loads and demeanour. Julie's final sentences are particularly telling, and reflect the fact that differences between pupils' adaptations are essentially differences of degree, not 'type'.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has been of an exploratory nature. I have not set out to establish any concrete categories of pupil adaptation or to finally prove/disprove the hypotheses of differentiation and subcultural polarization. I feel that the importance of the chapter lies in three main areas, each related to the "cumulative research programme" identified by Martyn Hammersley (1985: 246).

Firstly, I have offered a revised model for the analysis of pupil adaptations to the communicated school value system. The model is based upon earlier 'pro-' and 'anti-school' typologies but more clearly reflects the complexity of pupil adaptations. There is no attempt to fit pupils into simple, neat categories,

rather, there is recognition of the moment-to-moment potential for negotiation leading to action which might occur anywhere along a spectrum bounded by harmony and conflict with official expectations. A pupil's actions and attitudes might place them anywhere along a continuum of involvement in the school value system, but towards the poles there were recognizable positions of high commitment and alienation which reflected the growing polarization among the research age grade in City Road.

This revised approach is not the first attempt to reformulate the pro/anti model and is unlikely to be the last, but it does offer the most satisfactory framework for the analysis of the data which I generated in City Road.

Secondly, I have shown that a limited polarization in pupil adaptations took place within the upper school despite the lack of any single institutionalized divide such as streaming or banding. Despite the mixed ability grouping which dominated the pupils' time in the lower school (and continued in most subjects throughout their pupil careers), the actions of the school were a vital factor in the polarization of pupil perspectives and in the negotiation of educational opportunity within City Road.

Not all pupils could be identified as either highly committed or alienated and I was unable to examine certain factors which may have revealed further differences within the broader patterns of subcultural polarization (7). Yet fundamental distinctions between the subcultures were real and acknowledged by both teachers and pupils. The differences were vital to the perceptions of both sets of actors and crucially influenced how individual pupils experienced the school. On the whole, committed pupils had good relationships with their teachers, they shared academic goals and assumptions, as well as a similar sense of humour. On the other hand, alienated pupils conflicted with many of the school's official requirements while living up (or rather 'down') to the day-to-day expectations which their teachers held of them, by truanting, being noisy, aggressive and spending much of their time in the pursuit of opportunities to "mess around".

The interplay of many factors was involved. In order to understand the processes of differentiation and subcultural polarization in the school one must look to the selection of pupils for particular 'sets' and to the expectations and treatment of pupils by their teachers, which differed not only between, but also within, individual teaching groups. The actions of the pupils themselves, in groups which glorified very different perspectives on the pupil role, were a major factor in the polarization of pupil subculture.

A third important point arises from the last one and concerns the processes of selection to which pupils were subject throughout the research. The previous chapter considered the 'hidden' selection which sometimes occurred during the option process and showed that, despite the principle of freedom of choice, pupils could receive upper school curricula of very different academic statuses. From the exploratory work reported in this chapter it would seem that further selection was practised during the upper school years, not only in the overt setting introduced by some departments, but unconsciously within mixed ability environments. It is this further selection which would seem to explain the increase in the proportion of academic and split curriculum level pupils who appeared in the detention books during the upper school years (Tables 5.1 and 5.2). For example, some pupils in the mixed ability class had negotiated academic or split levels of curriculum placement in the options yet displayed only moderate degrees of involvement and lacked the access to scarce resources, such as teacher attention, which were readily available to some of their more highly committed peers.

In the previous chapter I noted that writers such as Stephen Ball (1981: 152) have drawn parallels between the selection which takes place within comprehensives during the option negotiations and that which was exercised at Eleven-plus in the tripartite system. This chapter has shown that, like those who entered Grammar schools, those pupils who negotiated upper-school curricula of relatively high academic status were guaranteed nothing. Further selection, in the form of access to scarce resources and differential teacher expectations meant that relative 'success'

TABLE 5.3: EXAMINATION PASSES BY GENDER AND CURRICULUM LEVEL\*

	Curriculum Level							
	Academic		Split		Non-academic		TOTAL	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
MALES								
No pass grade	57	38	86	19	95	19	70	76
At least one pass but less than five	36	24	14	3	5	1	26	28
Five or more passes	7	5	0	0	0	0	5	5
FEMALES								
No pass grade	38	11	86	18	100	20	70	49
At least one pass but less than five	48	14	14	3	0	0	24	17
Five or more passes	14	4	0	0	0	0	6	4
-----								
ALL PUPILS								
No pass grade	51	49	86	37	98	39	70	125
At least one pass but less than five	40	38	14	6	3	1	25	45
Five or more passes	9	9	0	0	0	0	5	9
-----								
TOTAL	100	96	100	43	101	40	100	179

Note: \* By 'pass' is meant grades A, B and C in GCE 'O' level and combined MEG (16-plus) examinations, and grade 1 in CSE examinations.

Based on the longitudinal sample.

in the options negotiations was a necessary, but not sufficient condition for success in the upper school. As I noted in the previous chapter, for pupils of academic upper school curricula many occupational and educational 'doors' remained open, the opportunities were still available - however, they were not guaranteed. This is evidenced by the age grade's performance in external examinations at the end of their compulsory education; data which graphically indicates the gap between certain pupils' experiences of City Road comprehensive.

Table 5.3 details the examination results achieved by those pupils who were present in City Road throughout the research field work, broken down by gender and curriculum level. The continued differentiation and consequent polarization of pupils in the upper school was reflected in the fact that 51% of pupils with an academic curriculum gained no examination passes. Although this was the lowest proportion of the three curriculum levels, the figure demonstrates that the options selection was only a first step towards educational achievement. It was, however, a step of considerable importance. The table demonstrates the strong association between curriculum level and educational achievement. Pupils of an academic curriculum level accounted for all those who gained 'O' level or equivalent 'pass' grades in at least five subjects. In addition, proportionately more pupils of the academic curriculum level gained passes in between one and four subjects. By contrast, all but one of the forty pupils who followed non-academic ('practical') curricula left City Road without a single pass grade (8).

This chapter is, I feel, one of the most important in this thesis, yet the processes of differentiation which are discussed here were not the only ones which I observed during my time in the school. For some pupils their 'ability' in lessons and the company they kept were not the only factors which could influence teachers' expectations of them and the treatment which they experienced as a result. Ethnic origin could have very real consequences for some pupils' experience of school and their opportunity to 'succeed' academically. It is this factor which is examined in

the next chapter.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. I will identify the key elements of the officially communicated school value system in City Road in a later section of this chapter.
2. My reasons for selecting these forms are outlined in Chapter 1.
3. The interview schedule and the rationale behind the questions are presented in Appendix 2.
4. Prior to that point I had observed my three original case study forms during many form periods as well as "Guidance" sessions in the school's careers library. I had also seen some lessons by chance as I went about the school interviewing teachers and pupils during the school day.
5. In the fourth and fifth years English was taught in eight groups:
  - 2 "'O' level groups" a) "Top" set studying GCE English language and literature
  - b) "Intermediate" set studying GCE language and CSE literature
  - 5 "Parallel" groups studying CSE language and literature
  - 1 "Bottom" set described as "sub-CSE" by the Head of English.
6. Details of the sociometric questionnaires are presented in Appendix 6.
7. I would have liked to have spent more time examining the similarities and differences between highly committed and alienated pupils of either gender. As Meyenn (1980) has noted, the work which has been done in this area has often produced somewhat contradictory findings. Unfortunately boys were over-represented in the research age grade and, because I used the form groups as the basis for my case studies, this over-representation was carried over to my interview and observational data. While I could not examine gender differences in adaptations as closely as I would have liked, I did establish that in many respects the assumptions and actions of pupils in the subcultures were fundamentally the same for both sexes. This is evidenced by the fact that in each case I have been able use transcript data from male and female pupils alike. The only major exception to this was the pupil-pupil aggression of the bottom English set, which was an overwhelmingly male phenomenon.
8. As I have noted, I was unable to collect reliable data on the social class backgrounds of the entire research age grade. Of my two final case study forms only four pupils from non-manual backgrounds were present throughout the field work. It was interesting to note that three of the four gained at least one 'O' level (or equivalent) pass at 16-plus. It may have been, therefore, that the pupils from non-manual backgrounds were over-represented in the ranks of those who achieved a minimum of academic 'success'. However, not all of these pupils could be described as highly committed. In a school



dominated by pupils from manual backgrounds, those of non-manual background were by no means the only ones to maintain a high degree of academic commitment or to succeed academically. Indeed, of my final two case study forms three of the four pupils gaining five or more pass grades came from non-manual backgrounds.

## CHAPTER 6: ETHNICITY AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

### 6.1 PREVIOUS WORK ON ETHNIC ORIGIN AND EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

- a) West Indian underachievement
- b) Ethnographic research on the experiences of West Indian pupils

### 6.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WHITE TEACHERS AND WEST INDIAN PUPILS

- a) Ethnocentrism and the white teacher-West Indian pupil relationship
- b) Conflict and the white teacher-West Indian pupil relationship
  - i. The control and criticism of West Indian pupils
  - ii. The reinforcement of West Indian pupils' 'deviant' image
  - iii. The myth of a West Indian challenge to authority

### 6.3 ETHNICITY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: the adaptations of West Indian pupils

- a) Ethnicity and academic failure: a subculture of resistance
  - i. The elements of a subculture
  - ii. The consequences of the subculture for clique-teacher relations
- b) Ethnicity and academic success: the case of Paul Dixon
- c) The complexity and range of West Indian pupil adaptations

### 6.4 THE EXPERIENCES OF PUPILS OF SOUTH ASIAN ORIGIN

- a) Social relations
- b) White teacher-Asian pupil relationships

CONCLUSION AND NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

## CHAPTER 6: ETHNICITY AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

"Overall, West Indians seem to get into more trouble than other groups..."

The Headteacher, City Road Comprehensive School

The previous chapter discussed the processes of differentiation and subcultural polarization which characterized the upper school careers of some pupils in the research age grade. I noted that the experiences of West Indian pupils were in some ways qualitatively different from those of their peers of other ethnic origins. Hence, I excluded West Indian pupils from the detention data which I presented. In view of this, I now wish to examine the significance of ethnicity in City Road. In particular I will focus upon the relationship between white teachers and their West Indian pupils: a relationship which placed the West Indian pupil in a relatively disadvantaged position within the pupil population.

This research is one of very few ethnographic attempts to examine questions arising from the multi-ethnic nature of the pupil population and begins by locating the present study within the broader context of previous work on West Indian underachievement.

The bulk of this chapter is concerned with an analysis of the position of West Indian pupils in the school. Firstly, the context of the West Indian pupil-white teacher relationship is examined. In particular I want to explore the often conflictual character of the West Indian pupils' experience of City Road.

Secondly, I will consider the adaptations of individual West Indian pupils drawn from my case study forms. This will highlight the significance of displays of ethnicity in the school and indicate the consequences of different pupil responses in terms of eventual academic achievement.

The final section of the chapter briefly considers the experiences of pupils of South Asian origin, examining some of the factors which distinguished their position from that of their West Indian peers in the school.

## 6.1 PREVIOUS WORK ON ETHNIC ORIGIN AND EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

### a) West Indian underachievement

In recent years there has been a great deal of both academic and popular interest in questions concerning the relationship between pupils' ethnic origin and their experience and achievement within the educational system in this country. In 1985, after several years of deliberation and a number of delays (which included the replacement of the original Chairman and consequent resignations), the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups finally published its full report, entitled "Education For All" (HMSO, 1985).

The report focused on the educational needs of children from a variety of ethnic minority groups, however, the origins of the committee lay in a desire to explore the particular situation of West Indian children in the English educational system (HMSO, 1985: vii). In 1981 this priority was reflected in the publication of an interim report, "West Indian children in our schools" (HMSO, 1981).

Both reports used statistical data, on examination results and post-school destinations, to confirm the widespread fear that as a group West Indian pupils were underachieving in relation to children of most other ethnic groups, including a broad category of "Asian" pupils as well as the white majority of school leavers (HMSO, 1981: 6-10; HMSO, 1985: 58-63).

A great deal of research has been dedicated to exploring some of the issues which surround the area of West Indian underachievement; recently summarized by Taylor (1983) and Tomlinson (1983). Studies have focused on a variety of possible influences ranging from questions of IQ and family structures to economic deprivation and language problems, however, very little research has focused on the processes at work within multi-ethnic schools. This omission is particularly striking given the accusations of racism within schools which were so prominent in the evidence submitted to the Committee of Inquiry by members of the West Indian community itself (HMSO, 1985: 66).

The Committee of Inquiry defined "racism" as "a set of attitudes and behaviour towards people of an another race which is based on the belief that races are distinct and can be graded as 'superior' or 'inferior'" (HMSO, 1981: 12). The interim report went on to note that:

"A well-intentioned and apparently sympathetic person may, as a result of his education, experiences or environment, have negative, patronising or stereotyped views about ethnic minority groups which may subconsciously affect his attitude and behaviour towards members of those groups (...) We see such attitudes and behaviour as a form of 'unintentional racism'."

The Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups (HMSO, 1981: 12)

As evidence of the extent of racism within schools the Committee's final report cited research concerned with teacher stereotypes of ethnic minority pupils, based largely on survey and interview methodologies (HMSO, 1985: 23-4). For example, Brittan (1976b) concluded, from primary and secondary school teachers' responses to her questionnaire items, that "teachers perceive 'West Indian' pupils as of low ability and as creating disciplinary problems" (Brittan, 1976b: 190). Brittan's respondents indicated very broad generalizations about West Indian pupils, something which they were often unwilling to do in relation to pupils of other ethnic groups.

Geoffrey Short (1983) has challenged Brittan's findings on the basis of a study of 65 first and middle school teachers, concluding "that teachers do not automatically brand their West Indian pupils with the cultural stereotype in toto; rather they selectively attribute those characteristics that accord with their experience of the individual child" (Short, 1983: 86). A report on Short's work in The Times Educational Supplement quoted from an interview with him, as saying that "English teachers don't have racial stereotypes, or, if they are aware of them, they don't operate according to them. They treat every child on his merits" (TES 30.12.83 p.5).

Over the following weeks the TES published several letters concerned with Short's research. Perhaps the most important comment was made by Ann Dummett (an

original member of the Committee of Inquiry) who noted:

[Short's] "survey was apparently conducted by sending questionnaires to teachers. How could such questionnaires possibly reveal unintentional racism? The only way to test an unintentional practice is by observation, not by questions whose replies must arise from the conscious intentions of the respondent."

Ann Dummett (letter to the TES 10.2.84, p.19: original emphasis).

Although she had resigned from the Committee of Inquiry, Dummett's stress on the need for observation was mirrored in the final report's reference to the work of Peter Green: a paper by the researcher was included in an annex of the report (Green, 1985). Although the sharp differences of opinion within the Committee of Inquiry (particularly concerning the chairman's evaluation and summary of many arguments in his "Guide" to the main volume) led to a somewhat disjointed and ineffectual final report, Green's work was accorded an important place in the chapter concerned with "racism" and has attracted great attention within the field of multicultural education (eg. Wright, 1985a). Therefore, before focusing upon the findings of previous ethnographic work in multi-ethnic schools, it is necessary to briefly outline Green's findings.

Green's Ph.D research grew out of a concern to chart how teachers' attitudes about race might be reflected in classroom interaction and thereby influence their pupils' self concept. Although, following Stone (1981), arguments concerning pupils' self concept often play a much reduced role in contemporary discussions of West Indian underachievement, the observational data which Green presented has importance beyond the field of self concept theory.

The research was set in six schools (three primary and three middle) with a pupil age range of seven to thirteen years. Just over half of the pupil sample were aged between nine and ten (Green, 1983a: 63). Seventy white teachers (twenty-eight male and forty-two female) were observed in multi-ethnic classrooms by use of a revised form of the Flanders schedule: a system which records the nature of classroom talk at frequent regular points in a lesson (1). Although the system is

rather inflexible and cannot deal with non-verbal communications, some of Green's findings are significant, particularly as they represent one of very few attempts to report the nature of life in multi-ethnic classrooms in this country.

Green's findings reveal that pupils who share a classroom can have very different experiences of education; differences which may relate in part to the gender of the teacher and pupil, but which also reflect the students' ethnic origin.

"... boys and girls of different ethnic origins taught in the same multi-ethnic classroom by the same teacher are likely to receive widely different educational experiences..."

Peter Green (1985: 53)

Green focused upon the amount of individual attention which teachers gave to their pupils "as distinct from teaching the class as a whole" (Green, 1983b: 4). He found that although women teachers tended to devote slightly more time to individual teaching both sexes gave a very similar proportion of that time over to each of the ten "modes of teaching" identified by the observational schedule. However, male teachers gave much more individual attention to male pupils, regardless of ethnic origin. Green noted that West Indian and Asian boys received proportionately more of their male teachers' attention than their white "European" peers. However, while the Asian pupils experienced generally positive attention (such as praise) the West Indian males' experience was much more negative, being subject to more than twice the amount of criticism predicted by their size in the pupil sample (Green, 1983b: 5). This pattern was not repeated for West Indian girls, who received less individual attention than their size in the sample would have predicted.

"The girl of West Indian origin, whilst she is relatively ignored by her male teacher, appears to receive a more positive style of teaching than her male counterpart who must, at times, wonder if there is anything more to classroom activity for him than criticism, questions and directives."

Peter Green (1983b: 5)

Green found that women teachers gave female pupils slightly more individual

attention than predicted by their size in the pupil sample, also they tended to criticize boys more often than girls. This was particularly pronounced in the case of West Indian pupils.

"Like their male colleagues, women teachers in the sample spent a considerable amount of their time criticizing boys of West Indian origin (+98.2%) and giving them directives (+40.6%)..." (2)

Peter Green (1983b: 6)

Overall Green's findings indicated that both West Indian boys and girls received more criticism than their Asian and European peers of the same sex, regardless of the teacher's gender (Green, 1983a: 93). Clearly these results are of great importance; they suggest that West Indian pupils, especially boys, may suffer relatively more authoritarian and negative relationships with their teachers than their Asian and white European classmates.

However, it should be remembered that Green's data can only indicate the broad distinctions within the life of those primary and middle school classes which were studied, his research tells us nothing of the processes behind the teacher-pupil relationships. For example, it might simply be argued that the West Indian males merited criticism by their behaviour in the classroom. It is in the generation of qualitative insights into the life of multi-ethnic schools that ethnographic methodologies offer a relatively unexplored avenue of research into the position of West Indian pupils in the English comprehensive school.

#### b) Ethnographic research on the experiences of West Indian pupils

Geoffrey Driver has tended to receive most attention for his research on West Indian achievement in five multi-ethnic secondary schools in which he suggested that West Indian pupils did not underachieve to the degree suggested previously (Driver, 1980a; 1980b). His methodology and findings have been strongly criticized (Taylor, 1983: 113-22) and as a result his earlier ethnographic study of a multi-ethnic Secondary Modern school (Driver, 1977; 1979) has been widely neglected.



Driver's study of "West Midlands School" was carried out in the early 1970s and examined the factors which influenced the perspectives of a group of West Indian pupils and their teachers. The study was inconclusive but of value in pointing to the complexity of interactions in a multi-ethnic school. Driver claimed that West Indian parents were more supportive of girls than boys, forcing the latter to seek support in the peer group, which could bring them into conflict with the school and hence depress their academic performance. Driver's published accounts of this research are brief and often rather vague. I feel that as a consequence, an important element of his work has been overlooked.

Driver noted the problems which white teachers experienced when trying to interpret the behaviours of their West Indian pupils. He argued that the teachers did not have the "cultural competence" (1977) to correctly identify the meanings which pupils were conveying in their actions, and that this "confusion" (1979) led the teachers to see West Indian pupils as difficult, problem pupils who were then streamed according to largely behavioural characteristics.

"Faced with the limitations of their own cultural competence ... teachers often felt that the only way forward was a power-based insistence that these (West Indian) pupils act according to the standards which they (the teachers) stipulated for them. This tended to intensify an already conflictual situation and to heighten the ethnic awareness of those involved."

Geoffrey Driver (1977: 356)

In his later article Driver offered some examples of the teachers' "confusion" in multi-ethnic classrooms. Firstly, he stated that white teachers were often unable to distinguish between West Indian pupils when they had long since learnt the identities of their white pupils. Further examples of "confusion" referred to a failure to correctly interpret meaningful behaviour, both respectful and derogatory, and noted the teachers' negative responses to pupils' use of patois (Driver, 1977: 136-8). Driver argued that white teachers were unable to distinguish between behavioural and academic evaluations of their West Indian pupils. Hence, West Indians were in a disadvantaged position in relation to other pupils. This strand of

Driver's work has not received the attention it deserves, however, his conclusions concerning the fundamentally conflictual nature of the white teacher-West Indian pupil relationship have been supported by later ethnographic research.

Fuller (1980) has reported her study of a group of eight West Indian girls in "Torville" comprehensive school in the London Borough of Brent. The girls were in their final year of compulsory schooling (aged between 15 and 16), and were members of the higher 'academic' band in the upper school. Fuller noted that whereas previous research (eg. Lacey, 1970) has tended to show pupils becoming increasingly anti-school in response to rejection by the school, her group of girls reacted to the "dual subordination" of their gender and race by evolving a subculture which centred on their determination to reject others' expectations of them.

"The sub-culture emerged from the girls' positive acceptance of the fact of being both black and female. Its particular flavour stemmed from their critical rejection of the meanings with which those categorizations are commonly endowed. Their consequent anger and frustration, unlike that of their black male peers, was not turned against themselves or translated into an automatic general dislike of whites or the opposite sex. Rather their feelings and understandings gave particular meanings to achievement through the acquisition of educational qualifications."

M. Fuller (1980, reprinted in Hammersley and Woods, 1984: 81)

The girls' desire to prove their worth and to have some element of independence in, and control over, their lives, led them to value academic success as a means to an end. Fuller described the girls as "pro-education" but not "pro-school". They displayed some (limited) deviance around the school, which served to distance them from the role of the "good" (model) pupil, but never threatened the teachers' authority (Fuller, 1980: 83). Similarly, their friendship patterns reflected their ethnicity and gender, rather than their academic orientation, in that they chose friends "from among both academic and non-academic black girls" in the school (Fuller, 1980: 85).

Fuller's work is of great importance, firstly, because it highlights the feelings of rejection often reported by West Indian pupils in English schools (3).

and secondly, in demonstrating the variety of responses which are possible given such rejection. The academic success of Fuller's girls (gaining an average of around seven examination "passes" each at 16-plus) may give some grounds for optimism. However, recent research has tended to paint a more depressing picture. For example, Barrie Middleton (1983) spent a term interviewing and observing in a multi-ethnic comprehensive. Like Driver, Middleton found that the teachers identified West Indian males as a source of trouble. Consequently West Indian boys were over-represented in the lower of the school's ability bands. A similar picture has emerged from a larger study carried out by Cecile Wright.

As part of a wider investigation into the educational and vocational experiences of young people of ethnic minority groups (Eggleston et al, 1984) Cecile Wright carried out an ethnographic study of two schools in a Midlands authority, later summarized in two articles by the same author (Wright, 1985a; 1985b). In "Upton" school pupils of West Indian and Asian origin made up approximately 25% of the pupil population, whereas in "Landley" school they accounted for more than 60%. Wright reported a conflictual relationship between West Indian pupils and their teachers in both research schools, and argued that this led teachers to assign West Indian pupils to low streams and bands in the upper school.

In Landley there was a feeling among staff that the school was being "swamped" by ethnic minority pupils, while at Upton great resentment was caused by crude racist jokes which were made by some members of staff during lessons. Like Green (1985), Wright reported that "the West Indian pupil-white teacher interaction very frequently took the form of enforcing discipline rather than encouragement or praise" (Wright, 1985a: 12).

Wright argued that in both schools the low priority which white teachers accorded their West Indian pupils led to increased deviance and, in some cases, to a conscious rejection of the aims of schooling.

"... conversations with a group of 16 black pupils showed a general belief that the school's organization, like the teachers themselves, was against them. Consequently, the pupils accepted that they were

going to fail anyway, and saw little point in trying. Furthermore, they interpreted this perception as a fait accompli, an inevitable outcome of the school's attitude towards their colour."

Cecile Wright (1985a: 12)

In Upton this response was most clearly demonstrated in a large grouping of more than thirty West Indian pupils (boys and girls drawn from the third, fourth and fifth year) who had moved away from the aims of the school, used patois as a "deliberate assertion of their 'blackness'" and were seen as a "threatening physical presence" by the Headteacher (Wright, 1985a: 12-13). In her account of this group Wright explicitly referred to Hargreaves (1967) as a parallel case of teacher expectations leading to a subculture which stood in opposition to the norms and values of the school.

"As in the Hargreaves case, these pupils have developed a sub-cultural adolescent group within the school which is not only anti-school, but also somewhat anti-white."

Cecile Wright (1985a: 12)

Therefore, Wright highlighted a tendency among West Indian pupils to 'live down' to their perception of teachers' expectations of them, something which runs contrary to the actions of Fuller's girls, who actively rejected the low expectations others held of them. Wright also differs from Driver (1977; 1979) and Fuller (1980) in her report that West Indian pupils of both genders suffered similar situations in school and responded in broadly similar ways. Both of the earlier accounts suggested a male response that was not only more vigorous, but qualitatively different, to that of West Indian girls.

It is clear therefore, that to date the little ethnographic research that has been conducted in multi-ethnic schools has painted a somewhat incomplete and even contradictory picture of teacher-pupil interactions. All the writers noted above are agreed upon the conflictual nature of relations between white teachers and West Indian pupils and that this must have negative consequences in terms of the goal of

equality of educational opportunity. However, there is no consensus as to the pupils' responses to such a relationship, or indeed, as to the processes which shape that relationship. The latter is the most startling omission. Although many researchers (ethnographic and otherwise) have indicated the conflictual nature of white teacher-West Indian pupil relations, few have attempted to analyse their workings. For example, Green (1985) wrote of teacher "ethnocentrism" but offered no explanation of where these attitudes were rooted. Similarly, in a recent paper Figueroa and Swart (1986), having noted the scant awareness of multi-cultural issues among teachers in a small (400 pupil) comprehensive school, went on to speak of teachers' "racist and ethnocentric frames of reference". Yet the authors offer remarkably little evidence of any such frames from their interview and observational data.

In fact Driver is the only writer mentioned above who has actually considered the origins of the white teacher-West Indian pupil conflict, ie. in his discussions of teachers' "cultural competence" (1977) and "confusion" (1979). Wright has criticized Driver's analysis as offering only a "partial explanation" of the problem (1985b: 22), yet her own conclusion echoed his in its emphasis upon the conflictual relationship as clouding all official dealings with West Indian pupils.

"In sum, the case study indicates that the relationships between teachers and pupils of West Indian origin in both schools was often antagonistic. The teacher-pupil relationship influenced the teachers' professional judgement of the pupils' ability and some West Indian pupils may have been placed in inappropriate ability groups and examination sets, so restricting their educational opportunities."

Cecile Wright (1985b: 22)

My own analysis shares certain features with those of Driver and Wright, but goes beyond previous work in its attempt to isolate the factors involved in day-to-day interaction which lead to the conflictual white teacher-West Indian pupil relation. My analysis includes a framework for the interpretation of pupil responses which also allows the reconciliation of certain seemingly contradictory

elements in previous ethnographies of multi-ethnic schools.

## 6.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WHITE TEACHERS AND WEST INDIAN PUPILS

To an outsider it might have seemed that City Road Comprehensive was a school which had no 'race problem'. Unlike certain multi-ethnic schools which have been studied previously, the teachers in City Road were not prone to telling crude racist jokes of the "chocolate factory" variety (Wright, 1985a: 11), neither did they feel that the school was being "swamped" by "alien" pupils (Wright, 1985a: 13). In addition, City Road was not one of a number of comprehensives in the area which were singled out for explicit criticism by a local Afro-Caribbean group, which claimed that a disproportionate number of West Indian pupils were being suspended from school. This apparent lack of conflict was misleading.

In City Road West Indian pupils typically experienced conflictual relations with many members of staff. This chapter sets out to examine some of the processes which lay behind the situation and in particular focuses upon the interpretative judgements of white teachers in their relationships with pupils of West Indian origin (4). The consequences of these perspectives in terms of the teacher-pupil relation are examined before moving on to consider the West Indian pupils' adaptations and their relation to educational achievement. It is useful to begin by locating the teacher-pupil relationship within the wider cultural context of the multi-ethnic school.

### a) Ethnocentrism and the white teacher-West Indian pupil relationship

Previous work by writers such as Howard Becker (1952) and, more recently, Sharp and Green (1975) has suggested that teachers differentiate between pupils according to how closely they meet certain notions concerning the 'ideal client', a construction which is drawn primarily from the life style and culture of the teacher

him/herself.

"Professionals depend on their envioning society to provide them with clients who meet the standards of their image of the ideal client. Social class cultures, among other factors, may operate to produce many clients who, in one way or another, fail to meet these specifications and therefore aggravate one or another of the basic problems of the worker-client relation..."

Howard S. Becker (1952, reprinted in Becker, 1970: 149)

In the previous chapter I noted that certain styles of behaviour, dress and demeanour were required of the pupils in City Road, styles which typically reflected the middle class norms and values of the school. However, as Becker suggested, social class factors are not the only ones reflected in the "specifications" concerning the ideal client, ethnic differences may also have consequences for teachers' perceptions of their pupils.

The notion that human beings often interpret 'strangeness' as in some way threatening is not a new one; we are often suspicious of things which we do not understand. However, in their institutional role, teachers in multi-ethnic schools are required to perceive and respond to a variety of traits which may seem 'alien' to them. The most obviously 'strange' behaviours were often those beliefs and practices associated with Asian pupils who, for religious reasons, were sometimes required to dress and eat differently to their white peers.

Despite the apparent similarities in their linguistic and religious backgrounds, pupils of West Indian origin also exhibited cultural traits which were not familiar to their white teachers. These 'styles' were not as obviously 'foreign' as the Asian languages or dress customs, but they did have origins outside the white cultural experience of the teachers. This fundamental point was not recognized by the staff of City Road who imposed their own ethnocentric interpretations upon West Indian behaviour, often leading to conflict between teacher and pupil (5).

Of the 19 West Indian pupils who were ever part of my research age grade, only

three reported having been born outside the United Kingdom in a questionnaire written and distributed by a member of the City Road staff. However, this does not mean that they had the same cultural experience as their white peers. Many of the West Indian pupils were to some extent living within two cultures, ie. firstly, the culture of their home and social life, which often reflected key elements of an Afro-Caribbean experience and tradition, and secondly, the 'white' culture of the school. In addition to the influence of their parents and guardians, who had emigrated to this country from the Caribbean, these pupils seemed to gain some awareness of their cultural 'difference' from the media and their contacts with a larger Afro-Caribbean community centred around another part of the City. The West Indian pupils in my case study forms frequently mentioned in conversation that they watched certain programmes on television which were concerned with the black experience in Britain, in particular a current affairs show (called "Black On Black") and a situation comedy ("No Problem"). The latter of these focused on a group of West Indian teenagers in London and seemed to reflect many of the styles of language and demeanour which these pupils could encounter in a local district (which I shall call Cityside) and which I sometimes observed among West Indian pupils in the school.

Cityside was the main centre of Asian and Afro-Caribbean settlement in the City and, although it was a bus ride away from the research school, almost all of the West Indian pupils in my case study forms reported some contact with the life of the area; a few had lived there for a time, while others had close family or friends there. The latter included pupils who had been attracted to the area as "somewhere to go" when they were at a loose end, and they had made contacts with other West Indian youths and post-school age teenagers in Cityside.

In interviews and informal conversations with West Indian pupils in the school it became clear that they often adopted different styles of demeanour when they were in the 'separate' worlds of the school and their social life outside. However, these styles were not always exclusive to one setting and elements of a wider West



Indian 'youth' culture were sometimes seen within the school. For example, a particular style of walking (with seemingly exaggerated swinging of the shoulders and a spring in the step) was occasionally used by some West Indian males in the school. My observations suggested that the style was exclusive to West Indian males and that it was always interpreted as in some way 'inappropriate' by members of staff. Teachers' reactions to this walk could range from initial amusement, with members of staff exchanging grins behind the pupil's back, to more or less disguised hostility. Often the walk resulted in the pupil being told to "get a move on", but on one occasion I saw Charley Thompson (a member of one of my case study forms) called out from a line of pupils entering the assembly hall and told to "Stand up straight" and "walk properly" (field notes).

Although, in my experience, the staff seemed always to regard the walk as in some way inappropriate, its meaning was not fixed for the pupils concerned. For example, I asked Charley about the incident described above:

"I always walk- well, its not my usual walk sir but you know that most black people DO walk like that [smiles] don't they? Have you ever noticed that, you know with springs in their foot and things like that. [laughs] I just can't help it, it's the way- it's the people I hang 'round with sir, and they walk like that, so you just pick it up ..."

This style of walking, therefore, often reflected nothing more than a "good feeling", something which was usually lost in the face of staff responses to it. However, on rare occasions the style did have more symbolic importance. For example, during one lesson which I observed Charley was sent out of the room as punishment for speaking with a friend; as he was ordered out the whole class fell silent and all eyes turned to watch him. Charley stood, slowly placed his pen on the desk and left the room in the relaxed walking style described above. On this occasion the walk did not express a feeling of well being, rather, it allowed Charley to salvage some dignity from the situation, acting as a sign of independence: he did not leave with his head down in embarrassment.

It is impossible to say whether the staff's negative attitude toward such a

style of walking was prompted by its occasional use as a strategy of resistance, or if the reverse was true, indeed the question is unimportant. What should be noted is that a behavioural 'style', rooted in the ethnicity of West Indian pupils, was without exception interpreted by their white teachers as being inappropriate to school. This reflected a more general tendency among the staff to devalue anything which did not conform to their (white) expectations. I have examined the interpretation of the style of walking in some detail because it was a behavioural trait whose control by staff could not be justified by reference to any educational rationale. For example, teachers often displayed similar attitudes towards types of dress and speech which reflected West Indian ethnicity but might state that these were clearly in conflict with certain of the school's aims.

The teachers would argue with pupils that school rules forbade the wearing of badges and caps/berrets and that everyone should try to speak 'correctly'. In a fourth year assembly the Headteacher emphasized that "every pupil is equally important" and (unlike the style of walking noted above) it was the case that white pupils were also occasionally corrected in their speech and told to remove non-uniform items from their dress. The official policy (publicly stated in assemblies and school handbooks) that, as the Headteacher put it, "No-one has the right to expect any different treatment to anyone else" had the consequence that certain displays of ethnicity were labelled as 'deviant'.

I am not suggesting that the teachers used school rules as an excuse to harass West Indian pupils. The vast majority of staff I spoke with seemed to genuinely believe that "treating everyone the same" was the best way to deal with the ethnic diversity of the school's pupil population, indeed they may have been correct in their assumption that making exceptions for certain pupils would have led to unrest amongst their peers. Unfortunately, one consequence of these teacher perspectives was that almost any display of West Indian ethnicity in the day-to-day life of the school was deemed inappropriate and controlled; either officially (in the case of non-uniform dress) or informally (in the case of speech and the style of walking

noted above).

Clearly the situation was complex, but the interaction of the factors noted above was very significant, for it meant that white teacher-West Indian pupil relations were set within a wider school context where West Indian ethnicity was devalued and became a potential source of conflict. It is within this context that white teacher-West Indian pupil interactions must be understood.

b) Conflict and the white teacher-West Indian pupil relationship

As I have already noted, previous ethnographic work in multi-ethnic schools has tended to characterize the relationship between white teachers and their West Indian pupils as one of conflict, however, we are rarely given any insight into the processes which lead to this situation. I have already argued that displays of ethnicity could bring about criticism where no official rule was broken. However, such ethnocentrism was only one dimension in the complex of processes by which West Indian pupils often came to be seen as a threat to the authority of teachers.

i. The control and criticism of West Indian pupils

Green's research (1983a) in seventy multi-ethnic primary and middle school classrooms suggested that West Indian pupils received disproportionately high amounts of control and criticism from their white teachers. A similar pattern of interaction was apparent in City Road comprehensive during the pupils' final years of compulsory schooling (6).

During the lessons which I observed in the pupils' fifth year I noted the number of criticisms which the teacher made of each pupil. Where West Indian pupils were present, they were among the most criticized and controlled pupils in the group. Perhaps more significant than the frequency of critical and controlling statements which West Indian pupils received, was the way in which they were often singled out for criticism when several pupils of different ethnic origins were engaged in the same behaviour. This was potentially even more harmful to

teacher-pupil relations. It was not that West Indian pupils were simply criticized more often than their white peers, but that the same behaviour in a white pupil might not bring about criticism at all.

A frequent recipient of such control was Paul Dixon, a West Indian pupil in one of my case study forms. Paul achieved highly in written examinations but his form tutor reported complaints of "silly behaviour in some lessons". In the 'O' level English set Paul sat with a group of boys, mainly white, who would often whisper comments to each other during the lesson. Paul took a full part in such exchanges, but was by no means the only pupil to speak. However, it was usually Paul who was told to be quiet: during my observations of the set he was the single most criticized pupil.

A tendency to control West Indian pupils in particular, even when their peers of other ethnic groups were also involved in the 'deviant' act, was sometimes quite startling. For example, both Paul Dixon (a West Indian) and Arif Aslam (an Asian) arrived seven minutes late for a mixed-ability lesson which I observed. They apologized for the delay but explained that they had been with the Head of Guidance. Almost half an hour into the lesson, most of the group were working steadily and, like the majority of their peers, Paul and Arif were holding a conversation while they worked. The teacher looked up from the pupil he was dealing with and shouted across the room:

"Paul. Look you come in late, now you have the audacity to waste not only your time but his [Arif] as well."

The fact that Arif had arrived with Paul and that the conversation was a two-way affair was not reflected in the teacher's statement which explicitly criticized the West Indian while inferring that his Asian friend was blameless.

Teachers were often unaware of their disproportionate criticism of West Indian pupils and most of the incidents which I witnessed were not as clear cut as the one above. Yet the pattern of teacher-pupil interactions did not go un-noticed among the pupils. For example, during their fifth year, I asked pupils in my two case study

forms to answer some sentence completion items. West Indian pupils accounted for approximately 10% of the research age grade, yet in response to the item,

"..... is picked on by some teachers",

half of the pupils nominated were of West Indian origin (7).

Many West Indian pupils complained about this kind of treatment during interviews with me, but perhaps the most persuasive evidence was that offered by some of their white peers, whom, it might be argued, had nothing to gain by characterizing teacher-pupil relations in this way.

DG "Do you think the teachers particularly like or dislike some people?"

James Murray "I think some are racist."

DG "In what ways would you SEE that?"

James "Sometimes they pick on the blacks. Sometimes the whites are let off. When there's a black and a white person, probably just pick on the black person."

James was seen as an 'average' pupil by staff and (unlike some more alienated pupils) could not be accused of having any vested interest in portraying teachers in a negative way. Pupils whom I identified as highly committed also reported that some of their West Indian peers were subject to frequent and sometimes "unfair" criticism, however, they did not generalize from their observations and often rejected the notion that there was victimization of West Indians per se.

DG "Do the teachers treat any groups of pupils differently?"

Anthony

Clarke

"I know [a teacher] used to shout at Wayne and Charley a lot [both West Indians], but I mean, all the coloureds reckon that teachers are prejudiced against them.... I think that's a load of CRAP."

DG "Do you think that any groups of pupils are treated differently?"

Julie Bexson "Some people who've got a bad reputation, you know. they get picked on more. (...) Like if you're messing around in class sometimes, then the teacher will always presume that it's YOU who's messing around. If anything goes wrong,

it's you that gets it...  
I can't really explain."

DG "You can't think of any, say in your form, that might get -"

Julie "- CHARLEY [Thompson: a West Indian]. Yeah definitely.  
If there's any messing around it's always Charley that's  
done for it..."

It is clear that an awareness of the frequent criticism and control of West Indian pupils by their white teachers was not restricted to West Indian pupils themselves or to their more 'disaffected' white peers. Furthermore, the pupils' reports were supported by my own classroom observation.

The disproportionate criticism which West Indian pupils received from teachers was not the only source of conflict in the teacher-pupil relation. Interactionist analyses of 'deviance', such as that proposed by Becker (1963), do not, as they are sometimes accused, suggest that once a person is 'labelled' s/he will automatically internalise that judgement and commit further acts of deviance. In fact Becker identified a complex of factors which may, or may not, lead to the development of a "deviant career". Among the many influences which might lead to the confirmation of deviant 'labels' are the reinforcement of that judgement through subsequent interactions with actors in positions of institutional authority (such as police or teachers) and the development of a subculture which may seek to legitimate or even glorify the 'deviancy' (Becker, 1963: 36-9). An example of the latter is considered in the next section of this chapter, but for the moment it is necessary to examine the cumulative force of teachers' perceptions in their day-to-day interaction with West Indian pupils.

## ii. The reinforcement of West Indian pupils' 'deviant' image

Through my observations and conversations with actors in City Road I felt that a disproportionate number of West Indian pupils had gained poor reputations among the staff, particularly for being troublesome. I have already suggested that they were subject to criticism more often than their peers of other ethnic origins (even

where they shared in the deviant act) and, given the physically distinctive appearance of West Indian pupils, it was relatively easy for a teacher (even one who was unfamiliar with the class) to remember that a particular West Indian pupil had been controlled before (there were rarely more than a handful of West Indian pupils in any one teaching group). Once bestowed, a pupil's reputation could lead to further conflict between teacher and pupil. This in turn might reinforce the sense of conflict and suspicion which could be seen both in staff beliefs concerning 'troublesome' West Indians and the sense of victimization felt by the pupils.

A pupil's poor reputation could act to increase the teacher's readiness to control that pupil, since s/he 'knew' that trouble was likely to come from that quarter. For example, the following account of classroom behaviour is taken from an interview with Vicky Mitchell, a white girl in one of my case study forms, who was very highly committed to many aspects of the official school value system.

DG            "Do you think that any groups of pupils are treated differently in the school?"

Vicky        "Yeah, I mean Paul Dixon (...) I could cause trouble as well as him, if something went wrong while the teacher wasn't there, they'd probably try and blame him, when it could've been ME. You know what I mean, I could have done it for a laugh or something, and if [teachers] come in sometimes late, you know, you've got a bad name then that's it, you know, it's always them."

Another consequence of such a reputation might be that behaviour which does not fit the negative image is highlighted as 'strange' or even ridiculed by the teacher. Rather than concluding that the reputation is wrong, or at least a simplification, the situation is judged in relation to that image. Consequently it is the behaviour which is queried:

Vicky        "Paul [Dixon] and people like that, you know if they really do settle down to their work then the teacher'll say, 'Oh, whats wrong with you, YOU'RE WORKING', and taking it out of them then 'CAUSE THEY ARE WORKING. And I suppose he thinks 'Why bother... they're always getting at me'. I feel sorry for him in a way."

Vicky's report that Paul had been criticized for academic effort was similar to certain observations of my own. For example, during the option choice process I watched as Roger Haynes (a West Indian pupil who was not a member of a case-study form) discussed a change of options with a member of senior staff. Roger successfully changed from Art to Chemistry, however, the difference in the 'academic natures' of the subjects was commented upon by the teacher.

"What is all this intellectual push that you're going on? Are we going to see a different Mr. Haynes this term? Hard working?  
[smiles]  
I shall look for great things."

The exchange was good natured and both teacher and pupil laughed at the comments, yet, despite the apparent friendliness, the interaction served to emphasize that a move from a low status, practical subject (Art) to a more highly prized 'academic' option (Chemistry) was not 'characteristic' of Roger's previous reputation. The change of option was not blocked by the staff member, but his sarcasm suggested that the "intellectual push" might be doomed to failure.

Negative reputations and consequences such as those noted above were not exclusive to West Indian pupils. However, they did seem to suffer from such stereotyping more often than pupils of other ethnic origins. For example, poor reputations and staff expectations of likely trouble were not only the result of frequent criticism by the teacher concerned, informal conversations between teachers could 'alert' other members of staff. Indeed, a pupil's reputation was sometimes formally communicated to each of their subject teachers via a system of report cards.

Report cards were an official means of monitoring a pupil's behaviour. The pupil was given a printed card which included spaces for their subject teachers to confirm the pupil's attendance and to write comments concerning their behaviour. For example, Wayne Johnson (a West Indian in one of my case study forms) was given a card on which his form tutor had written a request that subject teachers' comment on his "punctuality", "attitude" and "behaviour". The pupil was required to hand this



TABLE 6.1: PUPILS IN THE RESEARCH AGE GRADE WHO RECEIVED AT LEAST ONE REPORT CARD DURING THEIR TIME IN CITY ROAD BY GENDER AND ETHNIC ORIGIN\*

	Ethnic Origin									
	White		W. Indian		Asian		Mixed R.		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
MALE										
Received a Report card	9	8	30	3	9	1	0	0	10	12
FEMALE										
Received a Report card	3	2	44	4	0	0	33	1	8	7
-----										
ALL PUPILS										
Received a Report card	6	10	37	7	7	1	10	1	9	19

Note: \* Data does not include any pupil placed on a report card after December 1985, when the field work ended.

Percentages are based on the research population.

card to each of his/her subject teachers and finally present it to their form tutor at the end of the school day. Each card included enough space for approximately four days worth of comments. In some cases pupils were given several cards consecutively. For example, during the first term of her fifth year, one of my case study pupils (a West Indian girl) was told that she would receive report cards for the remainder of her school career.

Several pupils in my case study forms received report cards during their career in City Road. Many stated that the cards had not embarrassed them at all, but there was a feeling that they sometimes led teachers to move pupils from their friends, causing resentment.

Wayne (a West Indian pupil)

"You just walk in a room, sit down. They say 'Get up and move over there'. And all I did was walked in the room."

The importance of report cards was two-fold; firstly they indicated that the pupil's behaviour was considered enough of a problem to warrant official action beyond informal word-of-mouth reporting. Secondly, they represented a likely source of reinforcement of 'deviant' labels. The official requirement to take note of, and record, the behaviour of a particular pupil drew teachers' attention to a potential source of trouble and could lead to actions which might inflame the situation further (such as changing their seat). In view of these factors it is significant that during their school careers, proportionately three times as many West Indian pupils in the research population received at least one report card than pupils of any other ethnic origin (Table 6.1) (8). Given the greater control and criticism of West Indian pupils, their proportionately greater representation in Table 6.1 is in the predicted direction. However, the absolute number of pupils who received report cards was very small and the figures should be treated with caution. A more broadly based comparison may be made by examining the receipt of senior management detentions by pupils of different ethnic origins across the research age grade.

Since all pupils who spent any time in City Road were able to appear in the

TABLE 6.2: PUPILS IN THE RESEARCH AGE GRADE WHO RECEIVED ONE OR MORE  
DETENTIONS DURING THE THIRD, FOURTH OR FIFTH YEARS\* BY  
GENDER AND ETHNIC ORIGIN

		Ethnic Origin									
		White		W. Indian		Asian		Mixed R.		Total	
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
MALE											
1 or more											
detention		47	43	70	7	55	6	43	3	49	59
FEMALE											
1 or more											
detention		29	22	67	6	33	1	33	1	33	30
-----											
ALL PUPILS											
1 or more											
detention		39	65	68	13	50	7	40	4	42	89

Note: \* Fifth year: Autumn term only

Percentages are based on the research population.

detention books at least once, the figures for Tables 6.2 to 6.4 inclusive are based upon the number of pupils of each ethnic group who were present in the research age grade at any time during the research. By using the broadest sample possible for the calculations concerning the relationship between detentions and ethnic origin I hope to make the analysis as rigorous as possible. It should be noted that two West Indian pupils joined the school roll very close to the end of the research fieldwork and had little time to appear in any detention records. Hence, the proportions of West Indians receiving negative sanctions are likely to be somewhat reduced by the late additions to that group. In relative terms the West Indian pupil population experienced the largest increase of any ethnic group resulting from new arrivals to the school. Despite these factors the relationship between ethnic origin and receipt of senior management detentions is striking.

Table 6.2 shows the proportion of pupils in each ethnic group who appeared in the detention books at least once during the research. The data reveals that proportionately more West Indian pupils appeared than any other ethnic group, a pattern that was true for pupils of both genders. In fact West Indian pupils who did not appear in the detention books were in the minority for both sexes, a pattern unique to that group.

Table 6.3 details the number of detentions totalled by each of the pupils who appeared at least once in the punishment books during the research. Again, as a group the West Indian pupils stand out as receiving an unusually high number of detentions. A majority of West Indian pupils who appeared in the punishment books went on to total at least four detentions during the research. Once again, this pattern was true for both sexes and unique to pupils of West Indian origin.

The proportionately greater receipt of report cards and senior management detentions among West Indian pupils in the research population was indicative of the often conflictual nature of white teacher-West Indian pupil relations in City Road. Pupils of other ethnic origins were sometimes subject to the same controls as their West Indian peers, but the frequency of the control and criticism which West Indians

TABLE 6.3: FREQUENCY OF DETENTIONS PER PUPIL DETAINED DURING THE  
THIRD, FOURTH OR FIFTH YEARS\* BY GENDER AND ETHNIC ORIGIN

		Detentions per pupil detained at least once										Total	
		1 only		2 to 3		4 to 5		6 to 10		11 or more			
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>MALE</b>													
White		53	23	35	15	7	3	2	1	2	1	99	43
West Indian		0	0	29	2	43	3	29	2	0	0	101	7
Asian		50	3	50	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	6
Mixed Race		33	1	33	1	0	0	33	1	0	0	99	3
<hr/>													
ALL MALES		46	27	36	21	10	6	7	4	2	1	101	59
<b>FEMALE</b>													
White		45	10	18	4	18	4	14	3	5	1	100	22
West Indian		17	1	0	0	67	4	17	1	0	0	101	6
Asian		100	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	1
Mixed Race		100	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	1
<hr/>													
ALL FEMALE		43	13	13	4	27	8	13	4	3	1	99	30
<b>ALL PUPILS</b>													
White		51	33	29	19	11	7	6	4	3	2	100	65
West Indian		8	1	15	2	54	7	23	3	0	0	100	13
Asian		57	4	43	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	7
Mixed Race		50	2	25	1	0	0	25	1	0	0	100	4
<hr/>													
TOTAL		45	40	28	25	16	14	9	8	2	2	100	89

Note: \* Fifth year: Autumn term only

Percentages are based on pupils detained in the research population.

received was greater. This served to reinforce both the existing conflicts between staff and pupils, and the simplistic notions which each sometimes held concerning the other, ie. the teachers' perception of West Indian pupils as a likely source of trouble and the pupils' sense of victimization.

### iii. The myth of a West Indian challenge to authority

I have already discussed the tendency among white teachers in City Road to disproportionately control and criticize their West Indian pupils. I have also considered some of the mechanisms whereby this criticism could take on the form of a cumulative process of increased labelling, leading to a heightened sense of conflict between the white teacher and West Indian pupil. I now wish to turn to a further dimension of this relationship which was of great importance, ie. that the conflict was often interpreted by both sides as being 'racially' motivated. The teachers and their West Indian pupils often interpreted the conflict between them, not merely as teacher versus pupil, but as white versus black.

Of particular importance was a tendency among members of staff to sometimes generalize that a pupil's behaviour signified a more deep seated challenge to the authority of the school, more specifically, a West Indian challenge to white authority. For example, I was present at a fourth year parents evening when Paul Dixon's father reported that his son had complained to him about racial victimization. After the meeting I spoke with Paul's tutor who told me:

"I think he [Paul]'s got it in for white (...)  
When you're talking to him he's going [looks away from me, feigning  
apparent disinterest].  
You know, you can see him thinking, 'What right have you got - a  
white - to tell ME off'". (field notes)

Driver noted the "confusion" of white teachers faced with certain behaviours which they might interpret incorrectly.

"Turning the eyes away was observed on many occasions to be made by a West Indian pupil as a sign of deference and respect to a teacher, yet it was received and interpreted by the teacher as an expression of guilt or bad manners."

Geoffrey Driver (1979: 137)

Whether the incident involving Paul Dixon was an example of this kind of "confusion" cannot be assumed. However, it was clear, from the evidence of white teachers and their West Indian pupils in City Road, that some teachers' tendency to impute a racially based threat to their authority in dealings with West Indian pupils could only add to the existing conflicts.

Michael Cooper (mixed race)

"...I got caught [playing truant] once, [a teacher] he asked me why I was doing it, but I couldn't give him a reason. So he started going BARMY at me, saying, 'Oh, all 'cause you're a different colour from me, you can't answer me' and all this." (9)

I wish to stress that the imputation of a deliberate challenge to authority, typified by the phrase "you can see him thinking", was not a crude stereotype held by obviously 'prejudiced' teachers. Rather, it was a way of thinking which was rooted in the ethnocentric assumptions of teachers and in their responses to the day-to-day demands made upon them within the school. The vast majority of teachers whom I met in City Road seemed genuinely committed to ideals of equality of educational opportunity, yet in order to carry out their job they had to control pupils. The teachers' insistence that all pupils should be treated alike and the range of demands upon their time and energies led them into a disproportionate amount of conflict with West Indian pupils. This was a fact of life for many teachers and reinforced a belief in a West Indian challenge to authority which seemed impervious to the complaints of pupils and parents. Many teachers had personal experience of 'trouble' with West Indian pupils and they often generalized this image onto the group as a whole.

A female member of staff

"I've never been assaulted by a white kid.

I've been thrown against a wall by a pupil and it was a black kid.

I've been called a 'Fucking slag' [by white kids] but I've only ever been HIT by a black kid." (field notes)

This quotation reflects the view, common among City Road staff, that as a group West Indian pupils presented a greater disciplinary problem than their peers of other ethnic origins. The detention data, which I have presented above, certainly supports the claim that West Indian pupils were frequently "in trouble". The question now arises as to why West Indian pupils appeared so often in the school detention books? Was it that they simply broke school rules more often than their peers? So far I have argued that much of the West Indian pupils' 'deviance' depended upon their teachers' interpretation of unfamiliar behaviours and an imputation of a West Indian challenge to authority. These questions may be explored further by returning to the information available in the school detention books.

In addition to examining the numbers of detentions given by staff, it is possible to use the teachers' brief comments on the "reason for detention" (recorded at the time the detention was given) as the basis for a tentative breakdown by the 'type' of explanation offered. In particular I will focus on the 'nature' of the recorded offence(s) as situated in either the 'routine' agreements and rules governing behaviour in the school, or in the 'interpretation' of pupil action by the member of staff. Clearly, all the detentions were based upon staff interpretative judgements to some degree, therefore before presenting the data I will explain the classification and its use in more detail.

I will classify as 'routine' all detentions where the reason given in the punishment book referred only to the pupils' transgression of some school rule for which the appropriate punishment was routinely felt to be a senior management detention. For example, "Smoking", "Truancy" and "Shop at breaktime" were staff entries which referred only to the particular rule which had been broken.



I will count as 'interpretative' all staff entries where the teacher explained the reasons for the detention by reference to their own interpretation of the pupil's behaviour - as opposed to simply observing which rule was judged to have been broken. If the member of staff, in officially recording his/her reason for giving a detention, felt it necessary to include a comment on the 'attitude' of the pupil then I will classify that detention as 'interpretative'. For example:

"Persistent disruptive behaviour and rudeness when challenged."

"Nuisance on the stairs, denial, lies."

"Rudeness and attitude towards apology."

The above "reasons for detention" refer to questions of interpretation much more than the explanations in terms of rules alone. The classification is an attempt to examine the extent to which detentions were 'earned' by breaking clearly defined school rules as opposed to offending teachers' less explicit expectations of 'acceptable' behaviour. As noted above, all detentions relied upon teacher interpretation to some extent, however, the distinction is a reasonable one. In my experience during two years of fieldwork in City Road, any pupil discovered truanting or smoking on the school premises would receive a detention. In contrast, teachers' perceptions of "misbehaviour", "rudeness" and "attitude" could vary dramatically.

It should be noted that because the classification is based upon the official explanation of the "reason for detention" it is likely to underestimate the 'true' level of what I have termed 'interpretative' detentions. For example, one form tutor gave three girls (two of them West Indian) a total of nine detentions over just three days, all for "Persistent lateness." In fact these entries represented a conscious decision by that member of staff to "clamp down" on a particular group of girls. The detentions were, therefore, closer to the type which I have defined as 'interpretative'. However, since I have no way of knowing whether any other 'routine' detentions are based on similar "clamp downs" I have decided to apply my

classifications rigidly, based purely on the official entry in the punishment book. In so doing I hope to make my classification as representative of the teachers' own justifications as possible. Hence, the nine entries noted above appear as 'routine' detentions in my analysis. Similarly, where a pupil failed to attend a detention s/he automatically received another to replace the one that they had missed. Such 'repeat' detentions will be counted as 'routine' because, although the original offence may have been 'interpretative', there was no element of interpretation involved in the carrying over of a 'repeat' detention. In applying my classifications in this way I hope to be as rigorous as possible by not classifying as 'interpretative' where there was any room for doubt. Thus I restricted my own interpretation of the detention data to a single criterion. If I had introduced my personal knowledge of particular cases it might be argued that I had biased the analysis in some way, eg. because I knew a greater proportion of the West Indian pupils in the research age grade.

Table 6.4 applies the routine/interpretative distinction to all detentions received by the research population. The data indicates that in the eyes of the staff West Indian pupils' offences tended to be of a different nature to those of their peers of other ethnic origins.

The majority of all detentions given during the research (for both sexes and all ethnic origins) may be categorized as 'routine' (67%), whereas less than a third of all detention-offences were described by the teacher in 'interpretative' terms (30%). This distribution was reproduced almost identically for pupils of either gender: 67% of all male and 68% of all female detentions may be classified as 'routine', with 30% and 31% respectively as 'interpretative'. Even given my qualifications about the classification and the source of the data it is possible to conclude that there was little or no significant difference in the incidence of the various 'types' of detention-offence between male and female pupils.

However, in terms of the ethnic origin of the pupils some important differences were discernible. For all white and Asian pupils detained, 'routine' violations

TABLE 6.4: "REASON FOR DETENTION" GIVEN DURING THE THIRD, FOURTH OR FIFTH YEARS\* BY GENDER AND ETHNIC ORIGIN

		"Reason for detention"						Total	
		Routine		Interpretative		Other**			
		%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>MALE</b>									
	White	77	72	22	21	1	1	100	94
	West Indian	45	14	45	14	10	3	100	31
	Asian	73	8	27	3	0	0	100	11
	Mixed Race	43	6	50	7	7	1	100	14
-----									
ALL MALE ENTRIES		67	100	30	45	3	5	100	150
<b>FEMALE</b>									
	White	75	54	25	18	0	0	100	72
	West Indian	50	12	46	11	4	1	100	24
	Asian	0	0	100	1	0	0	100	1
	Mixed Race	100	1	0	0	0	0	100	1
-----									
ALL FEMALE ENTRIES		68	67	31	30	1	1	100	98
<b>ALL PUPILS</b>									
	White	76	126	23	39	1	1	100	166
	West Indian	47	26	45	25	7	4	99	55
	Asian	67	8	33	4	0	0	100	12
	Mixed Race	47	7	47	7	7	1	101	15
-----									
ALL DETENTIONS		67	167	30	75	2	6	99	248

Notes: \* Fifth year: Autumn term only

\*\* Other detentions = where staff comment absent or illegible.

Percentages are based on detentions among the research population.

appeared twice as often as 'interpretative' ones. In contrast, West Indian pupils had an almost equal division between 'routine' and 'interpretative' descriptions. The small number of Asian and Mixed race females who were detained means that any breakdown by gender and ethnic origin for those groups would be meaningless.

In comparison to white and Asian pupils, therefore, a greater proportion of the detentions which were given to West Indian pupils appear to have been based upon offences whose identification rested primarily in the teachers' interpretation of pupil attitude/intent. The same also appears to be true for male pupils of Mixed ethnic origin (where one parent was of Afro-Caribbean origin).

Despite my qualifications concerning the definition and application of the detention-offence categories, the patterns which emerged are in the predicted direction. Hence, the data supports the hypothesis that the staff tended to perceive a disproportionate challenge to their authority in the behaviours of West Indian pupils. West Indians did not simply break clearly defined school rules more often than their peers.

There is evidence, therefore, that as a group West Indian pupils were disproportionately subject to negative sanctions within City Road. In view of this fact it is important to recognize that any complaints against the school, concerning behaviour which pupils or parents considered to be "prejudiced", were not treated with sympathy by the staff. For example, at one parents evening I saw staff actually laugh at a white parent's suggestion that one of their colleagues, whom they described as "a very experienced teacher", had insulted a pupil of mixed race. Most complaints were not dismissed so easily, the majority of staff recognized that race could be a very sensitive issue and tried to deal with grievances 'rationally'. Yet on each occasion that race was raised the school's response was to deny the validity of the accusation. A typical response was to claim that the pupil imagined the victimization: as one teacher told me, "it mainly exists in their minds". This view was not always expressed so simply, but whenever staff spoke of such

accusations they would typically deny them any validity. For example, a senior member of staff told me of an occasion when a West Indian was given detention:

"... it just happened that we decided that night that detention would be cleaning up the yard, picking up litter. But they [West Indian pupils] saw it as picking on him, 'It's not right, making him pick up litter just 'cause he's black'". (field notes)

Incidents such as this were interpreted by staff as offering support to their view that accusations of prejudice were likely to be over-reactions at the very least. There was also a widespread, although less often stated, feeling that accusations of victimization were frequently used as a "smokescreen", ie. a device to remove attention from the pupils' own actions. For example, as I have already noted, during the fieldwork a local Afro-Caribbean pressure group received a great deal of publicity concerning its accusation of discrimination in the suspension procedures of some local schools. One teacher with whom I spoke offered a very different reason for the over-representation of West Indian pupils in the figures:

"They're the ones who are causing most trouble".

Hopefully, the data which I have presented so far in this chapter has given some impression of the complexity of the interactions and assumptions which resulted in explanations such as this seeming not only reasonable to teachers, but true.

This description of the most usual responses to accusations of teacher "prejudice" will come as no surprise to educational researchers or practicing teachers. One of the most basic assumptions of teachers' work culture appears to be the belief that, regardless of the details of particular incidents, colleagues should support each other in all cases of complaint by a parent or pupil (eg. Becker, 1953). In City Road this meant that even a teacher who had a reputation amongst his colleagues as being, at best, "intolerant" was defended in the face of a parent's complaint.

Because teachers' perspectives denied any real legitimacy to accusations of

racial injustice, therefore, the pupils had no formal means of responding to their conflictual relations with staff. The following section examines some of the informal adaptational responses of West Indian pupils in my case-study forms and considers their consequences for educational achievement.

### 6.3 ETHNICITY AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: the adaptations of West Indian pupils

In the previous chapter I noted that there was a limited process of polarization among the research age grade during their upper school years. I have characterized this as a continuum of involvement bounded by adaptations which showed high degrees of commitment to, and alienation from, the officially sanctioned goals and means of the school value system. However, because the West Indian pupils' experience of school was qualitatively different to that of their peers of other ethnic origins their adaptations should be considered separately.

Given the often conflictual nature of the white teacher-West Indian pupil relation, and the lack of any effective official channel of response, the ways in which West Indian pupils adapted to their experience of schooling assumed very great importance. The full range of adaptations cannot be adequately analysed here. Even within a small sample such as that provided by City Road there was very great variety. Some notion of the problems facing these pupils can, however, be gleaned from an examination of individual cases.

In this section I wish to examine in detail the adaptations of certain West Indian pupils drawn from my case study forms. Their adaptations seemed to represent two extreme forms of response to the situation of West Indian pupils which I have outlined. My reason for considering two examples of West Indian pupil adaptations in such detail is that they clearly demonstrate the significance of displays of Afro-Caribbean ethnicity in City Road and highlight the size of the task facing academically ambitious West Indian pupils in a school dominated by white teachers

and their often ethnocentric perspectives.

The cases which I will consider involve the adaptations of an academically ambitious male and a clique of three West Indian lads who came to be seen as something of a threat to the order of the school. In each case I will outline the pupils' adaptations to their situation in City Road and consider their consequences in terms of academic achievement.

a) Ethnicity and academic failure: a subculture of resistance

A group of three West Indian males in City Road established a reputation out of all proportion to their size in the research population. As one teacher told me, "They're THE stand-out group in that year" (field notes). The three pupils (Wayne Johnson, Barry Clayton and Roger Haynes) were widely seen as being intelligent yet determined to cause trouble. While most teachers knew that these pupils 'hung around' together, few recognized the strength of the bond between the three. In fact, they developed a coherent subculture which glorified those elements of their identities within the school which were routinely devalued (their ethnicity) and subject to control (their physical prowess).

i. The elements of a subculture

In the previous chapter I used an understanding of the term 'subculture' which was drawn from the work of Becker and his colleagues (Hughes, Becker and Geer, 1958; Becker et al, 1960; 1961). This definition emphasizes the importance of intensive interaction and a shared situation (role or problem) as the basis for the development of a coherent set of understandings and agreements. Such a framework lies behind the following analysis of the subculture developed by three West Indian males in City Road. In particular I wish to examine the importance of the informal group, the goals and values which the subculture stressed and the modes of co-operation which dominated their interaction with each other and with non-clique members.

The informal group: West Indian pupils in the research population routinely faced certain problems during their day-to-day experience of school, such as the recurring conflicts with white teachers which I have examined above. However, such experiences were not sufficient to lead most of the pupils to the adaptational responses which this clique exhibited. The extensive interaction of the three pupils at an earlier point in their careers seemed crucial in shaping the responses which set them apart from their peers.

Wayne, Barry and Roger were West Indian males who shared not only a similar sense of ethnicity but also interacted on a frequent and intense basis. Barry and Roger were members of the same form throughout their secondary school careers, while Wayne joined City Road during his second year. Wayne was the only West Indian male in his second year form and seemed to have met and become friendly with Barry and Roger through contacts in certain lessons and particularly during sporting events and practices which were held after the school day. All three were prominent members of the school's sporting teams during their second year.

The three seemed to have formed a closely-knit group very quickly and by the time my field work began, early in their third year, they could always be seen together at break times and even during assemblies where different form groups usually sat apart. Further evidence of their closeness may be seen in Wayne's responses to my sociometric questionnaires: following a suspension meeting Wayne had been moved to another form within City Road (3C), yet his only friendship choices outside that form were of Barry and Roger, he indicated no links with his previous form.

The three pupils also spent a great deal of time together outside school. They would structure much of their free time around group activities, such as hanging around the City centre, where they could "LOAF". The members of the clique also shared contacts in the wider youth culture of Cityside, which led them into larger social networks involving post-school age West Indians. It was within these larger networks, that members of the clique would sometimes attend dances and meet in local



bars.

Goals and values: In many ways the clique mirrored the characteristics of a much larger West Indian counter-school group reported by Wright, especially in relation to their displays of ethnicity and reputation as a "threatening physical presence" (Wright, 1985a: 12-3).

All three members of the clique were seen to engage in displays of ethnicity which owed much to a media presentation of "blackness" as well as their own contact with the larger Afro-Caribbean community in Cityside. For example, all three members occasionally wore badges featuring the colours of Ethiopia and used creole expressions and styles of speech. I also saw Wayne and Barry use the relaxed style of walking which, as I noted earlier, was exclusive to West Indian males in City Road. The clique were not unique in their displays of ethnicity, but the importance of these symbols within the group was very great. Their ethnicity was crucial to the group, they mixed only with West Indians outside the school and identified their ethnic origin as the single most important factor in their experience of schooling. As I have already noted, displays of ethnicity often led to conflict with staff and this in turn led to further conflicts as the clique reinforced its reputation, among staff and pupils alike, as a "hard", physically powerful unit.

The clique revelled in their physical prowess. The three had won a reputation amongst their peers as being a very threatening force within the school and like Willis' (1977) working class white "lads", they were proud of their reputation.

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| Wayne | "No [pupil] in [City Road] has ever come out with an insult to us three, NEVER."   |
| DG    | "Why do you think that is?"  |
| Wayne | "'Cause they KNOW me you see. 'Cause they know us. They know us GOOD. They know us too well to say anything back to us. Because Clayton... they know not to mess with him."<br>(...) |
| DG    | "So you think you've got the kind of reputation where people will -"   |
| Wayne | "- Shut up and keep their mouths shut."  |

This extract may sound like empty boasting, but I had good reason to suppose that the claims were well founded. For example, a sentence completion questionnaire, which I administered to my two case study forms during their fifth year, included the item,

"..... picks on other pupils".

86% of nominations made by male pupils in the two forms cited either Clayton or Haynes (Wayne Johnson had been expelled by that time). Similarly, some pupils referred to the clique during individual interviews with me and even those who had themselves been disciplined for fighting in the past, felt the need to stress the confidentiality of their statements. For example, the following warning is taken from an interview with a white pupil who had been suspended for fighting earlier in his career at City Road.

"... but don't let that out. They [Clayton and Haynes] are about the two hardest in the school, so my neck'll be gone if anybody finds out I've said that."

Like Willis' lads (1977: 35-6) the clique's tough reputation was not always tested to the point of violence. In fact the clique had developed several strategies of intimidation which could usually avoid the need for violence. As Barry put it, "You just BRACE YOURSELF on 'em". For example:

DG            "If you have [an argument] with a pupil, does it USUALLY end up with a fight?"

Barry Clayton    "No, we just probably argue, and they just go about their business (...)  
I was arguing with [a pupil] ... I kinda just took off my blazer .... He just gave it me back [ie. a pen which they had argued over]. (...)  
You just keep a serious face."

Such strategies were necessary not only because there was always a risk involved in a fight, but because such trouble would bring about severe conflicts with staff, conflicts which they knew from experience could lead to formal suspensions and even expulsion.

Despite the strength of the informal group, it would be wrong to assume that the clique existed in isolation within the pupil body. Although the clique members recognized a set of strong mutual obligations, the majority of their time in school was spent in uneventful and even friendly contact with non-clique members.

Modes of co-operation: The clique was characterized by an intense loyalty and sense of equality amongst the members. Teacher's typically saw Wayne Johnson as "the biggest problem" and assumed that he acted as leader to the other pupils.

The Year Head "He [Wayne Johnson] likes to steal the show, you know, he's VERY ARROGANT, will take advantage of the slightest possibility (...) He likes to drag people in with him. He likes to be the SHOWMAN, the big guy, 'Look at me', you know. 'I can do this, I can do that'."

However, within the clique there were no clear authority distinctions.

Wayne "...we ain't got no leader. They [teachers] reckon I'm the leader, but I'm not the leader of nothing."

The lack of any group leader may have been related to the very small size of the clique, certainly this was a factor which seemed to heighten the sense of loyalty and mutual obligation which the members displayed. In a very real sense the three pupils felt themselves to be 'one'.

Wayne "Us three, we stick together you see. Anything happens to one, anything happens to ONE, they've got the other two to deal with (...) It's just us three, nobody else."

This is not to say that the clique spent their time exclusively in each others' company. They had not consulted each other over their subject option choices and consequently there was no optional lesson where the three were together. In lessons and form periods the clique members had routine contacts with other pupils, many of whom were white. However, their closest extra-clique contacts were with other West Indian pupils within the school, some of whom cited clique members as "close friends" in questionnaire responses. In the eyes of the clique these contacts were not of the same importance as the three-man grouping itself, which not only came

together at every opportunity during the school day, but also structured much of their 'free time' after school.

It should be noted therefore that although the clique recognized strong bonds of mutual obligation they did not exist in social isolation and their relationship with other actors in the school was more complex than might at first appear. Unlike Willis' (1977) "lads", who seemed to see non-group members as at best inferior (eg. the "ear'oles" and West Indians), and at worst as prey (the Asians), the members of this West Indian clique glorified their position and were conscious of their group identity, yet existed within a wider and more complex network of social contacts within the school. These contacts reflected their ethnicity and gender (the strongest ties being recognized by other West Indian males in the school) but did not define any group of pupils as natural enemies: being West Indian may have saved a pupil from the clique's physical attentions, but being white or Asian did not define a pupil as a target. Rather than setting out to create trouble with their peers or teachers, the clique generally seemed to respond to hints of trouble from other actors. However, any such 'hint' of trouble would not be ignored, indeed, the assumptions and values of the clique meant that any perceived threat or victimization was likely to be met head on. The consequences of this are considered below.

## ii. The consequences of the subculture for clique-teacher relations

The clique's glorification of their ethnicity and physical prowess acted as a basis for power within the pupil body and offered an independent standpoint which distanced them from the potentially demoralising effects of the criticism faced by many West Indian pupils in the school. The clique were subject to much criticism and control but remained convinced of their own worth and potential. However, a spiral of increasing control and response seems to have developed. The clique's reputation meant that staff expected trouble from them, eg. when I asked Barry and Roger's form tutor for permission to speak with them I was met with the enquiry;

"Yeah sure, have they been prats again?" (field notes)

This image of the clique (as being frequently at odds with authority) may have led staff to increased control of the pupils: certainly this seemed to be the case when I saw the three together about the school and watched Wayne in class. Where a teacher did seek to control a member of the clique, in view of their reputation as being "hard" and their belief that they were often victimized, the pupils were unlikely to quietly accept the judgement (10).

[During a discussion about Mr Flint, a particularly authoritarian teacher]

- Wayne        "Everybody else goes, 'Don't stand up to him'. I stood up to him." (...)
- DG            "[What about] Barry and Roger?"
- Wayne        "THEY WON'T BACK OFF NOBODY. Shit, I know them two wouldn't. (...) Sometimes I'll just put my head down [and work], if I don't walk into a room and they [teachers] start picking on me. I'll just get on with my work. But if they start picking on me - say I'm talking to somebody, just pick on me. But if somebody else is talking to somebody they don't pick on them - that's not right. They should pick on the other people as well, and I don't like that."
- DG            "Apart from you individually, do you think there are any other people that [teachers] pick on?"
- Wayne        "Yeah, Barry and Roger."

It should be emphasized that both 'sides' of the relationship were faced with a situation which seemed to offer them little room for manoeuvre: in order to teach, the teachers had to maintain control, yet the clique's reputation and perception of their position could not allow them to let control or criticism go unchallenged. This situation led to heightened conflict with staff and an increased sense of victimization and group identity among the clique members. Indeed, the clique's experience of conflict with the staff was such that they asserted that as a whole the school was a racist institution.

Barry "If me and somebody else is late... it's ME who's in trouble (...) Most of 'em [teachers] are prejudiced."

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Wayne "[The teachers] are after all the coloureds in that school."

This claim of racial victimization was only made with reference to West Indian and some mixed race pupils. Wayne stated that "I've never seen NO Asian pupils get done yet."

Almost every other West Indian pupil with whom I spoke stated that one or more teachers were biased against their ethnic group, but they saw such teachers as the exception rather than the rule. The clique's reversal of this assessment seemed to reflect their history of very serious conflict with the school. For example, in addition to each member of the clique receiving several senior management detentions, two of them were put on report cards and suspended from the school on more than one occasion.

I wish to emphasize that the clique's assessment of their teachers was not a simple blanket accusation of racism, used to divert attention from their crimes. For example:

[I asked Barry about his most recent suspension]

Barry "I brought a knife to school (...) Just carried it in my pocket, to peel an orange. (...) They took the knife off me, sent me home, said 'Don't come back until your parents come.'"

DG "Then what happened?"

Barry "They come up, sorted it all out and I was allowed back in."

DG "Do you think the school was justified in doing that or were they over-reacting?"

Barry "No, they SHOULD have done that. (...) I think they would have sent anybody home what they seen with a knife."

Similarly, the clique listed a number of teachers whom they felt were fair with them, teachers who "got on" instead of seeking to impose their authority.

Wayne        "[Good teachers] THEY GET ON, they talk the same language I do. They get on (...) They muck in. They do the same things [we] do. If you're quiet, they're quiet. If you shout, they shout... "

This assessment of good classroom practice was echoed by one of the teachers whom the clique described as being fair with them.

Mr Finch        "I just treat them as I find them. They know how far to go with me. If they give me any trouble, they know they'll get the same back, but usually they're alright. (...) If you're straight with them, they're OK." (field notes)

However, the view quoted above was not typical of official assessments of the clique. As I have shown above, the clique were not 'anti-school' in the sense that some have used the term, and I would not describe them as alienated from many of the key elements of the school value system. For example, Wayne, Barry and Roger each accepted the need to gain qualifications and had relatively clear visions of their post-school careers. The clique did not reject the aims of schooling, but did clash with some of the techniques employed by their teachers. However, their history of conflict with the school was widely interpreted by staff as signifying a deliberate rejection of the school's authority: as early as March of his second year, Barry was suspended and a change of school was suggested. In the suspension report the Headteacher wrote:

"There is a general feeling that Barry is preoccupied with flouting authority and that he will seek any opportunity to undermine it."

A senior member of staff also described Roger Haynes to me as a pupil who "flouted authority". Similar views were held concerning Wayne Johnson and it is revealing to briefly examine some of the staff comments about his expulsion from City Road during his fourth year.

When I began my field work, during the research age grade's third year, I was told by the Year Head that Wayne was on the verge of expulsion: "he really is at the end of the road". In fact Wayne survived the third year but unofficially he was not

expected to complete his education at City Road.

A senior  
teacher

"If he lasts through the fourth year- I mean what we're waiting for now, is for him to do one more thing and he'll be expelled."

This vision of the most likely end to Wayne's career in City Road was based upon his record of suspensions since he joined the school as a second year. The school operated a hierarchy of suspension 'types' culminating in a 'C' suspension, which almost always meant expulsion. Wayne's career was exceptional in that he remained in City Road despite two 'C' suspensions.

The Year Head "... he had a 'C' suspension about last April [ten months ago], which is the final one, and we had him back with a final warning. And then we had ANOTHER 'C' suspension after that. You know, this is how incredible it was."

The fact that Wayne had survived as long as he did was seen by his teachers as evidence of the school's fairness. One of them stated that "...if he'd have been WHITE he would have gone a LONG time ago (...) we have to appear to be more than fair." There was no doubt that Wayne had received several "final warnings", however, his accumulated warnings and suspensions must be seen within the context of white teacher-West Indian pupil relations in the school as whole. Of particular importance was the myth of a West Indian challenge to authority. Wayne had not committed any single offence, against the school or its staff, so serious that it would normally have brought about expulsion. Wayne was suspended and eventually expelled for a series of relatively more minor incidents. It was the cumulative nature of his deviancy which teachers stressed.

[From an interview during Wayne's third year]

The Year Head "I have him for [one lesson], for instance, and I don't hear a word out of him, he just gets on with the work. But there are other areas of the school where, if you give him half an inch, he'll take a mile. (...)

You name it, he's done it. Short of hitting a member of staff. Very, very insulting to members of staff. Theft. Disobedience. Undermining the members' of staff authority.



Told kids not to listen to members of staff. Refused to leave the room when requested. Just generally, he's done everything he could possibly do to get expelled. Short of, there's been no incident of him hitting anybody."

After Wayne's expulsion it was the cumulative nature of his offences which was again stressed by staff.

DG "Why's he been expelled, what did he do?"

Wayne's form

tutor "Well, nothing really - nothing serious, but it's, you know, it's just the latest in a long line..." (field notes)

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The Year Head "It was just two or three incidents on top of what had already gone off, you know, in the year, and really he just had to go."

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Headteacher "Well, it was just the final straw... It was this attitude. HE WOULD NOT BACK DOWN. He was in a fight and the member of staff tried to separate them, and he just would not let it go - screaming and shouting obscenities..." (field notes)

This emphasis upon the cumulative nature of Wayne's deviance was particularly significant because there was some evidence that the time scale of his offences was shortened in the teachers' recollections.

[From an interview prior to Wayne's expulsion]

DG "When was [Wayne's] last suspension?"

Teacher "Last month." [ie. January]

DG "Last month, what was that one about?"

Teacher (...) [Having consulted a record] "No, 7th of November."

Clearly such errors would be unlikely during official suspension meetings when all documentation would be to hand. However, if such a mistake was repeated informally it could have led to increased official action that much sooner by amplifying the teachers' belief that Wayne was bent on challenging the school's authority: an accusation which, as I have already shown, was levelled against many

West Indian pupils.

Wayne's form

tutor "Wayne Johnson was just somebody who we tried and tried and tried with... School wasn't the place for him with his INNER DRIVE, as I saw it, to always appear to be number one, and unbowed by any authority... Our institution just couldn't brook that kind of continual challenge..."

The staff perspectives concerning the myth of a West Indian challenge to authority operated in such a way that any offence by a West Indian pupil could be interpreted as an indication of a more general 'attitude'. In the case of this West Indian male clique, who glorified both their ethnicity and their physical independence, the processes were amplified until the school took very serious official action against them in the form of suspensions and even an expulsion. As a result of these processes one of the three pupils involved did not complete his secondary education in City Road Comprehensive. Neither of the remaining two members gained any GCE 'O' level or equivalent CSE pass grades in their external examinations.

The clique of West Indian males described here share certain similarities with some previously analysed pupil subcultures. For example, I have already noted that an emphasis upon toughness seems to be a common feature of working class male subcultures (eg. Willis, 1977). However, rather than simply transferring elements of an existing class or ethnic culture into their school life, the City Road clique seemed to glorify their physical prowess as the one element of the staff image of them which they could exploit to enhance their position within the pupil population. The clique represent one form of response to the situation which they encountered within the school, a situation where their ethnicity was routinely devalued and they were subject to disproportionate amounts of control. The clique's subculture reflected both their ethnicity and gender, but the former may have been the most crucial factor since, as the research progressed, a parallel grouping of West Indian girls emerged as an important part of the research population (11).

Farrukh Dhondy (1974) has argued that a culture of resistance, similar in many ways to that which I have described above, will come to typify the West Indian response to their educational experience in this country (12). However, as I have already stressed, the pupil subculture described here was an extreme response to the West Indian situation in City Road; a response which, although rooted in the pupils' day-to-day experience of the school, was by no means inevitable.

b) Ethnicity and academic success: the case of Paul Dixon

The name of Paul Dixon has already been mentioned several times in earlier sections of this chapter: I have noted that he was seen as a pupil of ability but one who was accused of "silly behaviour" in lessons. Paul's white classmate, Vicky Mitchell, reported that he had a poor reputation and that his good efforts in class were sometimes highlighted as unexpected by teachers. I observed Paul in both set and mixed-ability groups where he was frequently criticized by staff although his 'offences' were often shared by white and Asian peers.

Paul was acutely aware that he was subject to more criticism than some of his peers and, like Wayne, Barry and Roger, he interpreted the control as racially motivated. His father mentioned this to Paul's form tutor at a parents evening and Paul first told me of his thoughts during a third year interview. In particular he stressed conflict with his form tutor.

"... he's prejudiced. You've been in our class right, now ain't you sir. (...) He's always on about my colour sir, whenever I'm getting done [punished] he says 'You're only doing this 'cause you're black' and all that..."

Paul's experience of disproportionate amounts of control was typical of West Indian pupils in the case-study, yet his response was very different to that of the clique noted above. Paul consciously sought to counter his reputation and promote an image of academic effort. For example, during my observations of his English set, in addition to being the most frequently criticized member of the group, Paul was also the pupil who volunteered most answers to the teacher's questions. Paul acted in a

way which publicly emphasized his commitment to academic achievement; in the English set he would shout across at a relatively noisy group of girls to be quiet and was always amongst the last pupils to pack away their work at the end of lessons.

Paul not only sought to counter his 'troublesome' image by emphasizing his dedication to academic achievement, he also consciously tried to avoid any further conflict with members of staff. This policy meant that when criticized by a teacher he would quickly accept the criticism with "Yes sir" or "Sorry sir". Unlike many of his West Indian peers Paul did not comment on the fact that other pupils were committing the same offence without punishment. This had the effect of quickly moving the interaction on beyond the criticism and avoiding any further problems which might arise if he was seen to openly question the teacher's view. Similarly, Paul would try to minimize contact with members of staff with whom he felt he was most likely to conflict. For example, in a fourth year interview I asked Paul how he got on with his teachers (remembering that in the third year he had accused his form tutor of prejudice).

- Paul            "They're all alright"
- DG             "Any that you particularly like?"
- Paul            "Not really."
- DG             "Any that you DISLIKE, you don't get on with?"
- Paul            "No... [form tutor]'s alright now." (...)
- DG             "You say [your form tutor is] alright NOW, how has he changed?"
- Paul            "He hasn't CHANGED really, it's just that I don't talk to him that much - I only answer the register."

The most significant fact about Paul's career in the fourth and fifth year at City Road was that he successfully resisted those elements of his school experience which might have led him into further conflict with the school, eg. rather than argue with his form tutor or seek a change of form group, he simply minimized his contact with that teacher. As the extract above illustrates, although Paul did not

have close relationships with any member of staff, neither did he generalize from his experience to assert that the school or the majority of staff were racist: he identified the conflicts which threatened his performance and did what he could to avoid them.

It should also be noted that Paul did not emphasize his ethnicity through any displays of dress or demeanour, eg. in styles of walking or speech. This undoubtedly avoided further conflict with staff. However, unlike his approach to teacher-pupil interactions in class, this may not have been a conscious strategy.

Paul's efforts to avoid trouble and concentrate on his work also led to qualitative changes in his social relations with peers. Paul maintained contacts with pupils of differing academic levels within the school, but it became apparent that as the age grade moved through the upper school, he was no longer seen as the leader of a form-based "gang" of lads.

When I first met Paul's form there was an obviously exclusive group of boys who sat around the same desk and were referred to by their teachers and classmates alike as "Dixon's gang". Paul was one of two West Indians in the gang, the other members being two white boys, an Asian and a pupil of mixed race. During the third year "Dixon's gang" was described by the Year Head as a source of trouble which led to the underachievement of all concerned and in my working notes I identified the gang as an interesting study (hypothesizing that they might move progressively further away from the goals and values of the school). However, during the fourth and fifth years something of a split occurred within the group. As always the same pupils sat together in form periods and they continued to have some contact outside school hours. Yet the gang was no longer a single unit; Paul and Arif Aslam (the Asian member) took no part in the pre-arranged truancy of other gang members and often spent form periods revising for tests together. The split within the friendship group was by no means total, but it was clear that they no longer shared similar adaptations to the demands of school. The importance of this development was as an indicator of the strength of Paul's determination to resist the image which many

teachers held of him as a potential troublemaker. Paul distanced himself not only from certain members of staff, but also from some of his closest friends within the school.

Like the members of the West Indian clique discussed earlier, Paul Dixon recognized but rejected the negative image which some staff held of him. However, rather than reacting through a glorification of that image within a culture of resistance, Paul channelled his energies into succeeding against the odds by avoiding trouble when he could and minimizing the conflict which he experienced with his teachers.

Paul completed his secondary education at City Road by gaining 'O' level (and equivalent CSE) pass grades in six separate subjects: the highest achievement of any West Indian male in the school that year.

c) The complexity and range of West Indian pupil adaptations

I have examined two extreme examples of how West Indian pupils in City Road adapted to their position within the school. The pupils concerned shared many similar experiences; they were described by staff as being intelligent yet troublesome and were subject to disproportionate amounts of control and criticism which they interpreted as being racially motivated. However, the pupils' responses to their situation were very different; the clique revelled in their ethnicity and physical prowess, and would respond angrily to occasions where they felt themselves to be treated unfairly. In direct contrast, Paul Dixon consciously sought to counter the staff's negative image of him. He minimized contact with those teachers he expected most trouble from and when faced with a conflictual situation Paul quickly accepted the criticism without complaint.

These cases represent extreme forms of response, but they were not unique: there were parallel examples of female pupils' adaptations which shared the fundamental features of the male responses detailed above. For example, a group of

West Indian girls developed a subculture of resistance which led them to act as 'protectors' to younger West Indians in the school, defending them from perceived attacks by white pupils and teachers. Some elements of the female subculture seemed rooted in sex-role differences and expectations which, like the male clique, glorified many aspects of the pupils' ethnic identities. This in turn could lead to increased conflict with the school (13).

The cases which I have presented above serve to highlight some of the consequences of West Indian ethnicity in a school dominated by the perspectives of white teachers. In order to succeed academically West Indian pupils in City Road had to continually act against the staff tendency to label them in a negative way. Clearly this situation meant that West Indian pupils in the school were in a relatively disadvantaged position. They were required to counter staff ethnocentrism without reinforcing the notion that they were troublemakers, a demand which few were able to meet. This does not mean that the majority of West Indians in the research population moved towards a subculture of resistance, in fact very few reacted with such passion. However, their situation was such that a commitment to educational achievement and hard work was not enough: the academically successful West Indian in City Road had to respond to their situation in a way which did not reinforce the staff's often negative image of them. Paul's solution demonstrates the demands this placed upon the pupils and offers an explanation for the pattern of achievement among West Indians in City Road.

Table 6.5 outlines the achievements of West Indian pupils in their external examinations at 16-plus. In City Road the West Indian pupils achieved a pattern of examination performance which was unique within the research age grade, ie. each West Indian pupil gained pass grades in either a minimum of five subjects or none at all. This tendency to polarize around the extremes of examination achievement reflected the size of the problem facing West Indian pupils in the school: unless they had ability and a suitably low-key response to their situation, they tended to follow a career which, although rarely as dramatic as that of Wayne Johnson, led

TABLE 6.5: EXAMINATION PASSES BY GENDER AND ETHNIC ORIGIN\*

	White		Ethnic Origin				Mixed R.		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>MALE</b>										
No pass grade	72	61	75	6	55	6	60	3	70	76
At least one pass but less than five	27	23	0	0	27	3	40	2	26	28
Five or more passes	1	1	25	2	18	2	0	0	5	5
<b>FEMALE</b>										
No pass grade	69	40	88	7	50	1	50	1	70	49
At least one pass but less than five	26	15	0	0	50	1	50	1	24	17
Five or more passes	5	3	13	1	0	0	0	0	6	4
-----										
<b>ALL PUPILS</b>										
No pass grade	71	101	81	13	54	7	57	4	70	125
At least one pass but less than five	27	38	0	0	31	4	43	3	25	45
Five or more passes	3	4	19	3	15	2	0	0	5	9
-----										
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>179</b>

**Note:** \* By 'pass' is meant grades A, B and C in GCE 'O' level and combined MEG (16-plus) examinations, and grade 1 in CSE examinations.

Percentages are based on the longitudinal sample.



them into further conflicts with staff and ultimately to academic failure.

Unfortunately the classifications used in official statistics do not allow a broader comparison between this pattern of achievement and that of any significantly larger population of West Indian pupils in English comprehensives (14).

An important part of my analysis has examined the role of ethnicity as a factor in the relationships between white teachers and West Indian pupils, in particular I have noted the conflicts which displays of ethnicity may generate. This should not be taken as meaning that West Indian pupils cannot be proud of their ethnicity and succeed academically, indeed, an example of such an adaptation has already been documented (Fuller, 1980). As Rist (1977) and Syer (1982) have emphasized, the interactionist approach to the study of deviance accepts the complexity of factors involved in social relations and at no stage should the processes of labelling be seen as inevitable. The aim of the present analysis is to highlight the size of the problem which faced West Indian pupils in a single multi-ethnic Comprehensive; pupils who by definition were disadvantaged in the teacher-pupil relationship. This case study has suggested that the nature of their position, in a school dominated by the perspectives of white teachers, was such that academic success was only a realistic prospect for a small minority who were able to minimize the conflicts inherent in their relationship with white teachers. However, before concluding my analysis of the significance of ethnicity in City Road it is necessary to briefly consider the position of pupils of South Asian origin, who were the only other ethnic minority group of significant size within the research population.

#### 6.4 THE EXPERIENCES OF PUPILS OF SOUTH ASIAN ORIGIN

"While the evidence about school performance of Asian pupils is not unanimous, the majority of studies ... show an average level of performance, other than in English Language, that is generally on a par with that of indigenous White children."

The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups (HMSO, 1985: 65)

This quotation from the final report of the Committee of Inquiry represents a clear statement of the most commonly held view of Asian pupils' educational achievement, ie. that on average Asian pupils do not underachieve. In fact this statement was qualified in the final report by emphasizing that the category 'Asian' was a very broad reference to pupils of different cultural traditions and experiences, and that there was some evidence that Bangladeshi children may be underachieving as a group. It has also been noted that the statistics submitted by the Department of Education and Science (HMSO, 1985: 110-118) indicate that on average Asian pupils were staying within education longer than their white peers, yet achieving much the same results as a group: as Krutika Tanna (1985) has stated this is another form of underachievement. Despite these qualifications, however, it is clear that as a group Asian pupils were not experiencing levels of underachievement comparable to those suffered by West Indian pupils.

It has often been argued that if West Indian underachievement was largely a result of teaching which is somehow ethnically biased, then it would be logical to assume that West Indian and Asian pupils should suffer similar levels of underachievement. The Committee of Inquiry countered this by quoting Bhikhu Parekh's observation that this kind of argument "is invalid ... because it wrongly assumes that the same factor must always produce the same results" (HMSO, 1985: 69 and 86). This is an obvious, yet crucial point. However, having established the principle that the ethnocentrism of white teachers may not have consequences which are identical for their West Indian and Asian pupils, it is necessary to move to an analysis of empirical cases. The following brief account of the experiences of the

Asian pupils in my research age grade is a tentative move towards such an analysis.

a) Social relations

During the research there were never more than three Asian girls in the age grade, therefore I shall concentrate on the experiences of the eleven Asian males who were present throughout the entire period of the field work. The majority of these pupils were British born Muslims whose parents had emigrated to this country from Pakistan.

Ethnicity played a major role in the social relations of the Asian boys in the age grade, such that almost all were connected via a complex of shared friendships. These contacts were usually based upon experiences which took place outside City Road comprehensive and could lead to friendships between pupils who never met during the routine of the school day.

Rafiq Ali    "Well I know Mansur and Amjad very well, but not too bad Aziz (...) I knew Mansur when I was small, and I knew Amjad when I was small. At nursery I used to know Amjad... And Mansur I used to know when I used to go to read [the Koran], I used to meet him down [at the Mosque]. (...) Aziz reads [the Koran at the same Mosque] but he don't live 'round my area."

The shared ethnicity of the Asian males could also unite them in other ways within the school, for example, through contact in lessons or coming together to defend someone from a racist attack by a peer; one pupil in particular acted as something of a guardian to other Asian males in the year. Within City Road some of the Asian males were often subject to attacks from their white peers, usually this took the form of racist name calling but I also observed physical assaults. For example, in the 'bottom' English set I observed two physical assaults which involved male members of the group, in both cases the victim was an Asian.

The small number of Asian males in the research population and their shared experiences as members of a minority group meant that their friendship networks extended to include almost every Asian male in the year. However, none of these

pupils were involved in networks based exclusively upon shared ethnicity. The responses of the Asian members of my case study and the nominations of their white peers indicated that many Asian males were part of ethnically mixed friendship networks which seemed to be built upon school-based contacts in form groups or lessons. Therefore, while their ethnicity linked the Asian males socially to a greater degree than was true for pupils of other ethnic origins, they were also part of much larger ethnically mixed networks. Hence, ethnicity did not act as the basis for the development of any exclusively Asian group. There were no Asian equivalents of the West Indian clique described earlier.

b) White teacher-Asian pupil relationships

Just as they did in relation to West Indian pupils, the staff often held generalized images of Asian culture. However, in the case of Asian pupils these images were often quite positive. For example, I was told by a member of the senior staff that one of my case study pupils came from a "very supportive, caring family. Typical Indian family really." This notion that the "typical" Asian family was supportive of education was in direct contrast to the widespread tendency among staff to doubt the interest of West Indian parents whom they had met.

Teacher [A West Indian pupil's] "father gives the impression that he probably gives him a good hiding now and again- I don't know.

I've got a feeling that the father is just supporting on the surface, you know. I don't feel there's a great deal of REAL BACKING there when it really matters."

The quotation above was typical of official assessments of West Indian parents; even those who were seen as well intentioned were usually judged to be ineffective.

There was a feeling among many staff that Asian pupils were 'quiet' and certainly not 'troublemakers'. This belief survived despite the fact that teachers often saw fit to discipline Asian pupils. Again this image contrasted with that of their West Indian peers; as I have argued above, any 'incident' involving a West

Indian pupil could form the basis for a generalization about that pupil and reinforce the wider myth of a West Indian challenge to authority. By contrast, a member of senior staff informed me with great confidence that no Asian pupils had been detained in the recent past, yet an examination of the school records revealed that more than half of the Asian males had received at least one detention during the research field work (Table 6.2).

This is not to say that Asian pupils always experienced good relationships with their teachers, or that teachers' views of Asians were always positive. Some staff saw Asian traditions as restrictive or even "destructive" (for example, concerning the responsibilities of school-age girls within in the family). However, in their day-to-day dealings with Asian pupils the staff did not hold any notions of them as being potentially troublesome, in fact, quite the reverse was true. My classroom observation indicated that Asian pupils seemed to experience teacher-pupil relations which were generally similar to those of their white peers of similar degrees of academic involvement. Teachers' expectations of Asian pupils seemed to owe more to their identity as a member of a particular set or friendship group than to their ethnic origin.

In many ways therefore, the Asian pupils' experience of life in City Road was much closer to that of their white, rather than their West Indian, peers. They were involved in friendship networks which reflected differing degrees of academic involvement, as well as their ethnicity. Furthermore, Asian pupils experienced teacher-pupil relations which were underpinned by teacher perspectives which responded primarily to their membership of a particular set or peer grouping rather than their ethnic origin. In addition, given any conflict with staff, there was no assumption on the part of teachers that this might be related to any more deeply rooted 'racial' trait.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have considered some of the ways in which ethnicity influenced the school experience of pupils in the research age grade. In particular I have focused upon the relationships between white teachers and West Indian pupils, relationships which were often characterized by a sense of conflict. I have highlighted the ways in which the situational demands upon teachers combined with their own ethnocentrism to place West Indian pupils in a relatively disadvantaged position within the pupil population. The majority of teachers whom I met in City Road genuinely cared about their pupils and would strenuously deny that they discriminated against West Indians. However, the teachers' perceptions of pupil behaviour and concern to maintain their authority led to disproportionate amounts of control and criticism of West Indian pupils.

The pupils' response to this situation led many into further conflicts with staff and ultimately to academic failure; the three man clique involving Wayne Johnson was the clearest example of this. However, academic failure was not inevitable. Some West Indian pupils did succeed academically despite the odds, most notably through the use of strategies which acted to minimize conflicts and prevent any escalation; Paul Dixon offered an example of such an adaptation.

It should be stressed that I do not intend my analysis as yet another example of what Bhikhu Parekh has called "the fallacy of the single factor" (HMSO, 1985: 69). I have not argued that the processes which I have discussed in this chapter were the only factors which influenced the school experience and achievement of West Indian pupils. Clearly certain factors associated with socio-economic status are beyond the school's control but may have important consequences for educational achievement. My principal concern is to highlight those factors within the white teacher-West pupil relationship which, in City Road Comprehensive, placed West Indian pupils in a disadvantaged position regardless of 'ability', gender or external economic factors.

The significance of the processes which I have identified lies in the fact they

were located within the role and culture of white teachers. I would argue that none of the teachers whom I have described or quoted in this chapter could be characterized as consciously prejudiced against West Indian pupils. However, the demands of their role as teachers, and their ethnocentric perception of their pupils, meant that West Indian pupils were seriously disadvantaged within the school.

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. The Flanders system involves an observer in noting the character of the action in a classroom at frequent regular intervals. The observer chooses the most appropriate description from a list of ten categories:
  1. Teacher accepts student's feelings.
  2. Teacher praises or encourages.
  3. Teacher accepts or uses the student's ideas.
  4. Teacher asks questions.
  5. Teacher lectures students.
  6. Teacher gives directions.
  7. Teacher criticises or justifies authority.
  8. Student talks in response to teacher.
  9. Student initiates talk.
  10. Silence.

Adapted from Wragg and Kerry (1978: 18)
2. The percentages reflect the difference between the "observed" and the "expected frequency" of receipt of a particular mode of teaching (the latter determined by the proportion of the pupil sample accounted for by each ethnic group) (Green, 1983a: 91). Therefore women teachers criticized West Indian boys almost twice as often as the number of West Indian males in the pupil sample would have predicted if ethnic origin were of no significance.
3. Further evidence on this may be found in the testimony of academically successful young people of Afro-Caribbean and African origin in the final report of the Committee of Inquiry (HMSO, 1985: 93-103).
4. Some pupils of mixed race saw themselves as sharing a common position with their West Indian peers and could be subject to the same processes of labelling. Members of both groups would sometimes refer to themselves as being 'black'. However, by no means all mixed race pupils shared this perspective and it is dangerous to generalize about such a heterogeneous group. Therefore my arguments in this chapter refer primarily to pupils who were identified (by themselves and by staff) as West Indian. Where a pupil of mixed race is referred to, or quoted, this will be made clear.
5. I follow Sandra Wallman's understanding of the term 'ethnicity' as "not simply difference: it is the sense of difference which can occur where members of a particular cultural or 'racial' group interact with non-members

... In broad terms it will normally be couched in terms of culture, race, nation or religion. In a more narrow, individual perspective the same difference may be described in terms of the minutiae of behaviour. At both levels, ethnicity is about the organisation of society and the organisation of experience" (Wallman, 1979: x-3; original emphasis). Therefore ethnicity refers to subjective notions of 'us' and 'them', to the 'sense' and expression of ethnic difference.

I wish to use the term 'ethnocentrism' in its most basic form, as referring to a tendency to evaluate other ethnic groups from the standpoint of one's own ethnic group. To this extent ethnocentrism is inevitable, however, a more precise definition includes a judgemental aspect which although common is not inevitable, ie. as "a tendency to prefer people belonging to the subject's own [ethnic group], to see things from the standpoint of that [group] and to set a lower value on other [ethnic groups]" (Adapted from Banton, 1972: 103). My analysis will demonstrate how the judgements of white teachers (rooted in their experience and culture) acted against the interests of West Indian pupils.

6. In an ethnographic study such as this I cannot summarize two years worth of observation and interview data in neat tabular form. However, the following examples of observational, interview, documentary and sociometric data will establish the validity of this statement.
7. Details of the sentence completion items are included in Appendix 7.
8. Unfortunately the school records did not include reliable data on the multiple receipt of report cards. Therefore I was unable to calculate the frequency of multiple receipt among pupils of different ethnic origins.
9. As I have already stated, some, although by no means all, pupils of mixed race experienced much the same processes as their West Indian peers. See note 4 above.
10. Similarly, Wright has spoken of a "stimulus-response situation" in one of her case study schools (Wright, 1985a: 13). However, the situation in City Road was far more complex than such a phrase might imply.
11. During the research a close-knit grouping of several West Indian girls developed within the upper school. The group was larger than the male clique dealt with here. The group focused around a core of four West Indian girls (three of whom were in the research age grade) and came to take on a similar reputation amongst their peers and staff as that achieved by Wayne, Barry and Roger. In many ways this group paralleled the male clique, however, I was unable to follow them as closely because of prolonged absences by two of the West Indian girls in my case study forms who might otherwise have acted as my 'sponsors' and introduced me to the group.
12. I feel that the culture of the West Indian male clique described here was one of resistance. I prefer this to the term 'counter-culture', since the latter seems to infer a blanket rejection of the fundamental aims and values of the school. I have already emphasized that Wayne, Barry and Roger were not anti-achievement, however, their subculture did stress an active resistance to what they perceived as the racist actions of teachers. The consequences of these subcultural positions may be much the same, but the distinction is an important one.
13. I have used the male pupils as detailed case studies in this chapter for



several reasons; firstly, I felt that my gender was more of a barrier to empathy with the pupils than my ethnicity. Despite the frankness of some pupils, there were clearly aspects of their social lives which it would be difficult for female pupils to discuss with me.

A second reason for my emphasis on the careers of male pupils was the strength of the contacts within the research population which were afforded me by my case study forms. Paul Dixon and Wayne Johnson were part of the main study and I was able to use the latter as a sponsor, ie. a means of introduction to the other members of the male clique (Barry and Roger). By contrast, the only academically successful West Indian girl in City Road was not a member of my case study forms and, as I have explained in note 11 above, circumstances prevented me from gaining informal access to the core members of the West Indian female clique.

14. Published statistics on the performance of much larger pupil populations do not allow full comparison with those presented here. For example, data from the Department of Education and Science Statistics Branch, included in the recent 'Swann' report (HMSO, 1985: 110-118), presents a category of achievement described as "At least 1 Graded Result but less than 5 Higher Graded Results" (HMSO, 1985: 114). Such a collapsing of pupils involves a range who may have gained anything from one grade 5 at CSE (which is not commonly accepted as a 'pass' by most employers or institutions of higher education) to those achieving four 'higher' grades at GCE which are commonly acceptable in competition for university entrance.

## CHAPTER 7: THE NEGOTIATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

### 7.1 THE NEGOTIATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN CITY ROAD

- a) The subject options process
- b) Differentiation and subcultural polarization
- c) Ethnicity and educational opportunity

### 7.2 THE WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT AND THE NEGOTIATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

### 7.3 BEYOND CITY ROAD: Some problems for future research

CONCLUSION AND NOTE TO CHAPTER SEVEN

## CHAPTER 7: THE NEGOTIATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

In this thesis I have examined some of the ways in which educational opportunity was negotiated through numerous interactions between participants within a single multi-ethnic inner-city school. The research field work was carried out over a two year period and focused upon the experiences of pupils in two mixed ability forms as they moved through the final years of their compulsory schooling. The intensive field work began in the pupils' third year and ended as they were entered for external examinations as fifth years.

Throughout the study I used a combination of several ethnographic techniques, including participant observation, interviews and questionnaires. I also analysed existing documentary evidence within the setting.

This thesis began by focusing upon "the options", a period of negotiation over curriculum "choice", which staff highlighted as a vitally important time for their third year pupils. The final chapters have concentrated upon the more 'routine' interactions of the upper school years which, although less dramatic, played an equally important role in the negotiation of educational opportunity in City Road Comprehensive. Throughout the work I have sought to analyse the complexities of the interactions which led a minority of the pupil population to academic success while the majority of their peers emerged from compulsory schooling with educational certification of little or no exchange value in competition for places in higher education and in an increasing section of the post-school labour market which uses academic certification as a selection device.

I have adopted a perspective which is rooted in the symbolic interactionist approaches associated with the Chicago School. In particular I have drawn upon the work of Howard Becker (Becker et al. 1961; Becker, 1963; 1970) and Erving Goffman (1959; 1967). However, my methodology and analysis also reflects more recent developments and debates concerning the ethnography of schooling in this country (eg. Ball, 1981; Burgess, 1982a; 1984a; 1984b; 1985a; Hammersley, 1983; 1985;

Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Woods, 1983; 1986).

The strength of the interactionist approach lies in its ability to penetrate the facade of the educational system and study schooling 'as it happens' in the day-to-day, moment-to-moment negotiations between teachers and pupils. The approach offers insights into the complex processes of education which are not normally available to larger scale, more quantitative work. However, small scale qualitative research also entails certain limitations; perhaps the most obvious concern the level of generalization which is appropriate given the particular basis of the findings. In judging the importance of the research reported here a number of factors must be considered.

Firstly, it should be restated that this has been a case study of a single school. Like all social settings, City Road Comprehensive was unique in many respects, therefore certain facts should be borne in mind when considering the extent to which the research may be used as the basis for broad generalizations concerning education in this country.

As I indicated in the first chapter, City Road was very much a working class school. This had consequences for almost every aspect of teaching and learning in the setting, in particular it seemed to influence teacher expectations concerning the nature of the pupil intake. However, social class was not a strong distinguishing characteristic within the pupil population. Although a relatively small proportion of the research age grade came from non-manual backgrounds, their similar socio-economic statuses did not act as the basis for any exclusive social networks or relationships, for example, in the way that gender and ethnicity sometimes did. Therefore, unlike Ball (1981) for example, I have not been able to add directly to the literature on social class differences in educational experience.

The female pupils in the research age grade may have been affected in some way by the fact that they were a minority within the year. However, the under-representation of female pupils was not a feature of other age grades in the

school and there was no evidence that it reflected any systematic influence upon the research age grade, eg. such as another school which might have appeared more 'attractive' to some parents of female pupils.

White pupils accounted for approximately 80% of the research age grade. However, pupils of ethnic minority origin were a significant part of the pupil population and their numbers were often over-estimated by themselves and their white teachers and peers within the school. Ethnicity was an important element in some pupils' experience of the school and, despite the numerical dominance of white pupils, City Road was seen by its staff, pupils and feeder community as a multi-ethnic school.

During much of the research field work the major teaching unions were engaged in industrial action and the sporadic strikes which occurred during the study undoubtedly affected the school experience of the research age grade. Throughout the thesis I have indicated those occasions where the industrial action directly influenced conduct within the setting, for example, concerning the introduction of a 'contingency' options organization. However, the main focus of the thesis highlights areas of school life which, although influenced by the industrial action, were by no means simply its product.

Despite the number of features which were peculiar to City Road, several aspects of the research are of significance beyond the walls of the research school. The case study method has become increasingly important within the sociology of education and this thesis adds to the growing number of ethnographies which seek to explore particular educational issues through the intensive study of one setting.

This study is one of very few ethnographic works which have examined the role of ethnicity in school experience and, as I detailed in Chapter 5, my project has a particular continuity of interest with a series of case studies which Martyn Hammersley has described as "a cumulative research programme" in the sociology of education (Hammersley, 1985). My research also adds to the surprisingly small ethnographic literature concerned with the processes of curricular differentiation

at 14-plus, highlighting the sources of staff conflicts and power over the apparently open negotiations. In addition, this study represents the first detailed ethnography of option choice in a multi-ethnic Comprehensive and explores more fully the role of teachers as agents who actively reinforced certain gender-related patterns of subject take-up.

In subsequent sections of this chapter I will look beyond the confines of City Road Comprehensive; firstly, to examine the significance of the wider social context within which the school operated, and secondly, to note the related areas of concern which this study has been unable to address but which beg the attention of future research. However, before considering these broader issues it may prove helpful to briefly highlight the main findings of this research and consider its significance in relation to previous work.

## 7.1 THE NEGOTIATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN CITY ROAD

### a) The subject options process

The subject options process was presented to the research age grade as the most important decision-making point in their school careers to date. This was no false claim, the options process produced curricula differences between pupils in the upper school which could be of very great importance in relation to their eventual school achievement. The process was also of importance for many members of staff. The quality of upper school teaching groups, the status, funding and, in some cases, survival of subject departments could be seriously affected by the number and 'type' of pupil who opted for each subject. Hence, in addition to the third year pupils, many members of staff also had a vested interest in the outcome of the subject options process.

In Chapter 2 I began my analysis of the City Road options system by tracing its

recent history and outlining the position and perspectives of each group of participants who were most involved within the school; the senior staff, teachers of optional subjects, form tutors and the pupils themselves.

The City Road options system was organized by members of the school's senior staff and reflected their conscious decision to formalize and reduce the role of subject teachers as choice advisers. Hence, the senior staff placed their own perception of subjects' academic status and the pupils' 'best interests' at the heart of the options system. However, despite their reduced official role in the options, subject teachers continued to exercise some influence over pupil choice; firstly, through a number of 'coaching' strategies, and secondly, through the involvement of some subject teachers as third year form tutors who had a pastoral responsibility to advise their pupils.

The pupils received a great deal of 'advice' during the options process and many applied officially sanctioned criteria (such as ability, enjoyment and occupational goal) in making their 'provisional' decisions. However, several pupils also applied 'illegitimate' criteria such as teacher attractiveness; in particular, a strong personal dislike for a subject teacher could deter pupils from an option altogether.

Having detailed the positions and perspectives of the key participants within the school, Chapter 3 focused upon the face-to-face negotiation of option choice and in particular examined the power of the staff members in the official meetings. By acting as a unified 'team' the staff almost always brought about any changes in option 'choice' which they felt were necessary. Typically the pupils and their parents would readily defer to the teacher's 'expertise'. However, because the staff genuinely felt that some element of choice was important, their ability to repeatedly challenge 'provisional' decisions was not limitless. Hence, in a minority of cases pupils were able to retain options which senior staff felt were 'inappropriate'.

The final section of Chapter 3 considered the limited renegotiation which took

place during the early part of the age grade's fourth year. Although relatively few pupils were involved, the renegotiations were not without significance. Firstly, some 'able' pupils successfully moved into new options. Secondly, subject departments could exercise a limited form of selection by negotiating the movement of certain 'less able' and 'troublesome' pupils into the school's 'sink' options.

Chapter 4 concluded the detailed discussion of the options process by considering the broader patterns of pupil experience which emerged across the age grade. I focused upon 'ability', gender and ethnic origin as elements of a pupil's identity which could have particular consequences for their experience of the options process.

In common with the practices discovered in a Secondary Modern School (Woods, 1979) and banded Comprehensive (Ball, 1981), in City Road the options process acted as a point of curricula differentiation which included a significant degree of academic selection. Some pupils emerged from the options process with curricula of widely differing academic statuses and, although the pupils themselves applied conceptions of ability in making their 'provisional' choices, members of staff also played an important role; 65% of the pupils in my three case study forms changed at least one of their original choices (Figure 3.1) and 54% of the changes involved a new subject of substantially different academic status (Table 4.3).

Pupil gender was an important element in many option 'choices'. Both the teachers and their pupils often applied stereotyped views of certain subjects as being particularly suited to one gender. In addition, teachers often acted in a way which reinforced gender-based stereotypes by challenging 'odd' (non-traditional) choices which they typically interpreted as a sign of mischief or misunderstanding.

Contrary to what might have been predicted on the basis of previous studies of ethnicity and academic selection (Middleton, 1983; Wright, 1984), in City Road the West Indian pupils were not over-represented in the lower status subjects. However, this should not be interpreted as proof that ethnicity had no consequences for teacher expectations. Rather, it reflected the fact that the options system (unlike



systems of streaming and banding) was officially defined as involving an element of choice; in informal option negotiations the West Indian pupils seemed particularly successful at resisting staff challenges.

My analysis of the City Road options process has taken up and developed a theme which has also featured in previous ethnographies of option choice, ie. the role of teachers as "choice mediators" (Woods, 1976; 1977; 1979). Through an analysis of the options process in City Road I have demonstrated the importance of teachers as agents of selection within a system which was defined in terms of 'choice'. However, teachers did not simply 'dictate' pupils' options, a genuine element of negotiation was involved. Also it should be emphasized that teachers did not form a homogeneous body with common interests, goals and values. Hence, the processes of negotiation also took place within the staff body, for example, as subject teachers adjusted to their reduced formal role and made use of various 'coaching' strategies.

The subject options decisions, therefore, mark a crucial time for staff and pupils alike and are likely to remain so despite the extensive reform of education in this country which is currently under discussion (1). Consequently, it seems probable that the curricula distinctions between the pupils on one hand, who followed a majority of academic subjects, and on the other, those who experienced overwhelmingly non-academic upper school timetables, will continue. However, the form which these distinctions take will undoubtedly be influenced if guidelines concerning a 'National Curriculum' (DES, 1987) are introduced. The ways in which such guidelines are implemented promises to be an important field for future research: among the questions raised may be a concern to establish whether a National Curriculum will limit the scope for selection and diversity at 14-plus or merely enshrine in legislation beliefs about the academic status of certain subjects which are already reflected in most schools' option systems?

Although the subject options process represented a crucial point in the school

careers of the research age grade, further processes of selection and negotiation continued in the upper school. Particular aspects of the pupils' experience of the upper school provided the focus for subsequent chapters of this thesis.

b) Differentiation and subcultural polarization

My analysis of pupil adaptations in City Road adds to a series of school ethnographies which have explored the processes of differentiation and subcultural polarization in different types of English secondary school. However, if these studies genuinely represent a "cumulative research programme" (Hammersley, 1985) it is one which is still in its very early stages.

My conclusions concerning differentiation and subcultural polarization in City Road must be viewed as tentative given the limited time available for classroom observation in the fifth year and the under-representation of female pupils in the research age grade. Throughout my treatment of differentiation in the upper school I sought to analyse the very complex processes at work within the setting: the importance of Chapter 5 lies in relation to three main areas.

Firstly, I outlined a revised model for the analysis of pupil adaptations. The model built upon key elements of the pro/anti-school typology and was consciously aimed at recognizing the complex, negotiated character of pupil adaptations. The notion of a continuum of involvement allows for the variation in pupil attitudes and behaviours without imposing artificially 'fixed' categories upon what are constantly changing and massively varied individual adaptations.

Secondly, I established that a limited degree of polarization occurred in City Road despite the lack of any single institutionalized divide such as streaming or banding. By no means all pupils could be identified as either committed to, or alienated from, central aspects of the communicated school value system, however, there were fundamental differences in the adaptations of certain pupils which were acknowledged and reinforced by both staff and pupils. The processes of differentiation and subcultural polarization were very complex and although the

teachers played a crucial role through their treatment of certain pupils, the actions of the pupils themselves were also of great significance.

An additional point to arise from the discussion of differentiation in the upper school concerned the ongoing nature of the processes of selection in City Road. Those pupils who had 'succeeded' in negotiating access to a majority of 'academic' options were not guaranteed future academic success. In the official decisions concerning the character of academic sets, and in the face-to-face interaction of teacher-pupil and peer relations, the negotiation of educational opportunity continued: even within the same classroom very great differences in teacher expectations and pupil subculture could be discerned.

Future research will undoubtedly consider the processes of differentiation and polarization further and it will be interesting to note whether the notion of a continuum of involvement provides an appropriate framework for analyses in different settings. One area in which much more work is necessary concerns the relative importance of academic differentiation and pupil experiences which are related to gender and ethnic identities.

I have noted that the under-representation of female pupils in the research age grade has consequences for the level of generalization which is appropriate when considering my findings. Therefore it was with caution that I stated that the processes of differentiation and polarization seemed to influence both male and female pupils in the case study. Gender influences were important but seemed to be secondary to the overall patterns of differentiation and polarization. However, it appeared that pupils' ethnicity could have consequences for teacher-pupil and peer relations which were independent of any official recognition of their 'ability'.

#### c) Ethnicity and educational opportunity

West Indian pupils were in a relatively disadvantaged position within the research age grade. This was neither the result of overt 'racism' by staff members nor rejection of the basic aims of schooling by the pupils. The often conflictual

relationship between the white teachers and their West Indian pupils reflected a complex situation where the demands of the teaching role (eg. to keep order and apply rules 'fairly') and the ethnocentric perspectives of the staff led to a disproportionate amount of control of West Indian pupils. The teachers anticipated certain differences in the language, dress and demeanour of Asian pupils but made no such 'allowance' for any differences between their own culture and that of their West Indian pupils. Hence, almost any display of Afro-Caribbean ethnicity was interpreted as, at best, inappropriate or, at worst, a challenge to authority.

Contrary to their white and Asian peers of similar 'ability', even those West Indians who had achieved highly in written tests and had demonstrated 'intelligence' through their day-to-day contacts with staff typically experienced conflictual relations with their teachers. Therefore, academically ambitious West Indian pupils faced a particularly difficult situation in which their responses to staff ethnocentrism became vitally important.

In order to illustrate something of the range and importance of the pupils' adaptational responses I focused upon the careers of two West Indian males drawn from my case study forms. Wayne Johnson and his closest friends developed an oppositional subculture which glorified those aspects of their identity which were most devalued and controlled by the school, ie. their ethnicity and physical prowess. A spiral of increasing control and response seems to have developed which eventually led to Wayne's expulsion from the school.

However, increased conflict and academic failure were not inevitable: in contrast to Wayne, Paul Dixon consciously tried to minimize conflicts and exhibited strategies of behaviour which avoided any escalation when he was criticized in class. In this sense a process of negotiation took place between the white teachers and their West Indian pupils; a process which demanded a great deal from the pupils and which placed them in a disadvantaged position within the pupil body.

My analysis of the significance of ethnicity in City Road must be seen in the

wider context of other work on multi-ethnic education. Obviously, a study of a single school cannot incorporate an investigation of all the factors which might lie behind the 'underachievement' of West Indian pupils as a group (HMSO, 1981: 1985). However, together with previous interactionist work in multi-ethnic settings, a case study approach can be of very great importance in revealing some of the school-based factors which act against the educational opportunity of West Indian pupils.

## 7.2 THE WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT AND THE NEGOTIATION OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Interactionist work is often accused of studying social action within a socio-historical vacuum which ignores the role of wider structural forces. In this section I want to argue that such a view misrepresents much interactionist work in the sociology of education. I will highlight some of the ways in which my own analysis has taken account of the wider social context and go on to consider the relevance of such work in relation to the macro-micro problem in sociological analysis.

A frequent criticism of small scale school-focused work has been its supposed failure to locate the school within its wider social and historical context. For example, Rachel Sharp has attacked Ball's account of Beachside as "engaging in a form of inner emigration in the face of the fundamental structural changes in British society currently being orchestrated by significant factions in the capitalist class ..." (Sharp, 1981: 282 quoted in Ball, 1987: 23).

In a similar vein Lawrence Angus (1986) has characterized symbolic interactionism as limited by a concern to explain actions and meanings "in terms of their immediate context" resulting in a situation where "both the prior knowledge of actors and, even more importantly, any link with a conception of a wider, external social reality, are denied" (Angus, 1986: 62: original emphasis).

In addition to making a priori assumptions about the nature and dynamics of societal reproduction, such criticisms do a serious injustice to the works which they attack. Although micro-sociological studies do not take macro-theoretical issues as their primary focus, any adequate analysis of a single case must indicate the consequences of wider influences upon the setting.

It is quite simply wrong to imply, as Angus (1986) does, that symbolic interactionist work views action as occurring in some sort of vacuum, unaffected by wider structural forces or by the participants' previous actions, experiences and beliefs. For example, in Chapter 4 I noted that in order to make sense of the situation in Beachside, Ball's analysis of the school's options process made reference to national differences in the status of certain disciplines and examination subjects (Ball, 1981: 138-41). Other interactionist studies have also acknowledged the importance of the wider social context: Lacey (1970) set his study of Hightown Grammar within the recent history of both the school and its local community. Similarly, Burgess' account of Bishop McGregor comprehensive made explicit reference to the crucial influence of local authority policy concerning both the pastoral and physical organization of its schools (Burgess, 1983: 237).

In common with previously studied schools, City Road Comprehensive did not exist in a social, historical and political vacuum. The particular location of the school, the history of the educational system in this country and the personal biographies of the participants each influenced the conduct of action within the school in some way. Such factors did not dictate the nature or the outcomes of the negotiation of educational opportunity which took place within City Road, rather they provided the broad socio-historical context within which the actions were situated.

In summarizing the principal findings of the research I have already drawn attention to particular consequences of the social class and ethnic composition of the research age grade and the school's feeder community. For example, concerning staff expectations of a pupil intake which was generally of below average 'quality'.

In broader terms the study has also acknowledged the consequences of certain socio-historical forces which acted upon the school. For example, the subject options process reflected the influence of many factors which were external to City Road Comprehensive.

The very concept of curricula choice reflects the particular history of the English educational system (Reid et al. 1974; Hurman, 1978). The ideal of equality of educational opportunity, the notion of a meritocracy and the particular problems of 'Comprehensive' schools which are often far from comprehensive in the nature of their pupil intake, have all had some influence upon the development of the current situation where an element of choice and specialization at 14-plus is taken-for-granted in most state secondary schools.

Therefore City Road operated its own system of option choice within a historical context which defined curricula choice as a legitimate and important decision-making point in pupils' school careers.

Within City Road there was something of a dilemma concerning the extent to which subject choice should be 'guided', a dilemma which again reflected factors which were not specific to City Road alone. Hence, an element of choice was considered to be desirable - reflecting a democratic 'progressive' ideology of pupil participation; yet the pupils could not be allowed a completely free hand because certain subjects were considered 'too important' to neglect - reflecting differences in academic status which were rooted in the history of the educational system and in the current economic and employment situations (Hurman, 1978; Ball, 1981; Goodson, 1983).

In addition, City Road existed within the wider culture of an English inner-city area and, more broadly speaking, of the modern industrial West. Hence, certain conceptions involving gender and ethnically related characteristics were of significance within the setting. For example, certain types of dress, language and demeanour clashed with the expectations of white teachers whose cultural background defined such 'styles' as improper and, in some cases, threatening. Consequently

many West Indian pupils experienced increasingly conflictual relationships with staff despite most teachers' genuine commitment to the notion of equality of educational opportunity.

Similarly, societal stereotypes concerning the typical male/female role in the post-school world played an important part in the options negotiations. Members of each participating group (teachers, parents and pupils) often displayed rather narrow perspectives concerning the appropriate educational/occupational goals for pupils of either gender. Such stereotypes were undoubtedly influenced by factors external to the school (eg. the structure of gender specialization in the economy, the local community and images in the national media) yet they were unconsciously reinforced within the options system through staff attempts to pre-empt choices which might lead to 'trouble' in the future. The staff aimed to avoid problems in the upper school, not to enforce gender stereotypes, yet their actions had much the same consequences.

Therefore, the structure of gender relations in society acted upon the research setting in many ways, not least through the routine assumptions which actors held concerning gender roles. However, the structure of gender relations was itself influenced through the unintended consequences of situated actions within the school; actions which aimed to avoid 'problems' in the upper school and often unintentionally reinforced gender-specific notions concerning certain educational and occupational goals. This analysis has consequences for the current debate concerning the 'macro-micro problem' and has a resonance with certain aspects of Anthony Giddens' critique of previous approaches (eg. Giddens, 1976; 1979; 1981; 1984).

The apparent gulf between the concerns of micro- and macro-sociological analyses has been the subject of much recent debate within the social sciences. In a recent commentary on the macro-micro problem within the sociology of education, Hargreaves has stated that the "gap between the world of small scale face-to-face interaction, on the one hand, and vast social structures of immense proportions on



the other" is "unbridgeable without the provision of some additional support". As a potential source of such support Hargreaves suggested the use of Mertonian "theories of the middle range" which would direct attention to a "middle or 'meso' level of analysis" (Hargreaves, 1985 reprinted 1986: 170).

The language of Hargreaves' paper is significant. He speaks of a "gap" to be "bridged" - the micro and the macro are understood as separate 'worlds', not only conceptually, but also in fact; hence, Hargreaves' suggestion of a meso level of analysis, concerned with the "range of intermediary processes and structures" (Hargreaves, 1986: 170; my emphasis).

However, as I have noted, certain micro-sociological studies have already been able to introduce elements of a macro nature into their analyses of particular research settings. The macro themes which have been mentioned arose from the need to understand particular research problems, not from any 'Grand' theory which asserts the dominance of certain groups and processes within society. This suggests that the introduction of an additional 'meso' level of analysis may be something of a red herring. The distinction between structure and action which appears so great in terms of the macro-micro argument is in fact a false distinction inasmuch as all actors operate within the wider context, which is itself a product of human action: the macro and micro are fundamentally interrelated, not separate. This is one of the central arguments proposed by Anthony Giddens in his "Theory of Structuration", which involves a critique of previous theoretical constructions concerning the macro-micro problem. Essentially the point concerns what Giddens refers to as the "duality of structure".

"The concept of structuration involves that of the duality of structure, which relates to the fundamentally recursive character of social life, and expresses the mutual dependence of structure and agency. By the duality of structure I mean that the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems. (...)

... every process of action is a production of something new, a fresh act; but at the same time all action exists in continuity with the past, which supplies the means of its initiation. Structure thus is not to be conceptualised as a barrier to action, but as essentially

involved in its production..."

Anthony Giddens (1979: 69-70; original emphasis)

Hence, the macro is reproduced in and through micro activities: Hargreaves' "vast social structures of immense proportions" have no separate existence outside the realm of micro human activity (eg. in the classroom, the factory and the household). Similarly, micro activities are structured by actors' use of macro resources (eg. drawing upon an ideology of participation or concerning conventions of gender specialization). The macro and micro are interrelated, not separate: structure is both "the medium and outcome" of human conduct.

Hargreaves summarized Giddens' approach as follows:

"Structures, [Giddens] points out, are not only constraining but enabling too. And given that they are reproduced through interaction, every act is therefore a moment of possible change, an act of production as well as reproduction, containing within itself both the likelihood of continuity and the seeds of change."

A. Hargreaves (1985 reprinted 1986: 170)

Hargreaves went on to criticize Giddens for providing too few empirical examples and no suggestions as to the theory's implications for future research. These criticisms are reasonable and my reference to Giddens' concept of the duality of structure should not be interpreted as indicating support for his entire approach. Indeed, the Theory of Structuration has been criticized for failing to take proper account of the very real differences in opportunity which are substantively available to certain individuals through their position within the social structure (Callinicos, 1985).

Despite these weaknesses, the concept of the duality of structure (as "the medium and outcome of the conduct it recursively organizes": Giddens, 1984: 304) is of significance in breaking down the barriers which have been erected between the macro and the micro: barriers which have already been penetrated by some interactionist work.

### 7.3 BEYOND CITY ROAD: Some problems for future research

So far this chapter has outlined the principal ways in which my study has taken up and developed themes which have appeared in previous works. I have also highlighted areas in which future research might continue the analyses presented here, for example, concerning the negotiation of subject options within a 'National Curriculum' and future work on pupil adaptations along a continuum of involvement. In this section I want to briefly consider certain related areas of concern which justify future research but which this work has been unable to address because of the nature of the research setting and the particular focus which I adopted.

I have already referred to the nature of the City Road pupil population and, more specifically, the character of the research age grade in this and several of the previous chapters (especially Chapter 1). At this point I wish to emphasize some of the consequences of the composition of the research age grade in terms of this project's coverage of particular issues.

Firstly, the strongly working class nature of the school's catchment area meant I was largely unable to examine differences in school experience between pupils of different social classes. 43 members of my final two case study forms were present throughout the entire field work, four of those pupils came from non-manual backgrounds. Within the forms social class did not act as the basis for any exclusive peer groupings (in the way that ethnicity and gender sometimes did) and although I could not gain reliable data on the social class backgrounds of the entire age grade, it did not seem that social class was a significant distinguishing factor within the pupil population.

Secondly, female pupils accounted for a minority of the research age grade: this resulted in an over-representation of male pupils in the groups which I observed and meant that I had fewer female pupils in the case study forms who could act as sponsors into wider social networks. In addition I felt that my gender

limited the extent to which I could fully explore certain aspects of the female pupils' subcultural adaptations to the school (see Chapter 1). Consequently, although I followed pupils of both sexes and drew evidence from across the case study forms, in Chapter 5 I was unable to fully investigate any gender-related differences in the subcultural adaptations of the case study pupils. Hence, my conclusions concerning the basic similarities between male and female adaptations to upper school differentiation must be viewed as tentative.

The absolute number of pupils in particular groups was also an important factor in relation to ethnic origin. Although the West Indian and Asian pupils were a very significant minority in terms of teachers' and pupils' accounts of the school, in absolute terms I would have preferred a greater number of ethnic minority pupils. For example, during the options process I was unable to observe sufficient 'spontaneous' negotiations to be certain of a West Indian over-representation among the pupils who were challenged in that way (Chapter 4). Also, the small numbers involved has forced extreme caution in any interpretation of quantitative data generated within the setting, such as detention records and examination results.

The role of ethnicity in educational experience is a vital area of research where qualitative work can be of immense value. By highlighting the interactional processes which lie behind familiar patterns of underachievement (HMSO, 1981; 1985) and discrimination (Commission for Racial Equality, 1985) qualitative research has the potential to make a unique contribution.

Despite the small absolute size of the ethnic minority population within City Road I am confident of my analysis of the relationships between white teachers and their West Indian and Asian pupils. My analysis of City Road adds to, and develops, an important strand of qualitative work which has focused upon ethnicity in particular educational settings, yet there is still much to be done. For example, teacher-pupil relations should be studied in settings where the composition of the pupil population differs from previous work; in the numbers of ethnic minority pupils and their social class backgrounds. Also, it may prove fruitful to adopt an

approach associated with previous 'school effectiveness' research (eg. Reynolds, 1985), ie. using various quantitative measures to identify particularly successful schools (in this case in terms of ethnic minority performance and experience) and then apply qualitative methods in studying those schools to discover the sources of their 'success' (after Gray and Jones, 1985). Clearly great care would be needed in selecting appropriate 'measures' of school performance but the approach may be useful in co-ordinating future case study work in multi-ethnic settings.

In addition to the sometimes restrictive composition of the research age grade itself, the focus and time scale of the fieldwork also influenced the degree to which I was able to investigate certain issues. For example, a longer period of classroom observation during the age grade's fourth and fifth years would have allowed a more detailed study of how friendship ties developed in the upper school teaching groups. However, because of other commitments (such as the design, execution and analysis of the 'structured' fourth year interviews) by the time I carried out my intensive observation of upper school groups certain friendship cliques had already established particular types of relationship with their teachers and peers.

The first lesson which a lone researcher must learn is that one cannot study everything or everyone. I chose to focus upon particular factors which seemed to influence the pupils' experience of the school, consequently I was restricted in the amount of time which I could devote to studying inter-staff relationships: an area which deserves a great deal more attention in future research.

In view of my pupil-based research focus I tried to spend as much time interviewing and observing different members of staff as seemed necessary in order to understand the pupils' experiences. For example, I spent a great deal of time with staff during the options process, when the perspectives of various actors within both the pastoral and academic systems became crucially important.

My work with the staff raised a number of issues which warranted further

investigation but which I was unable to study in depth. As I noted in Chapter 2, for example, the options process revealed the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, character of staff perspectives and interests: this was particularly apparent in the case of form tutors who could experience difficulties in reconciling their pastoral role (as pupil adviser) with their vested interests as subject specialists.

Additional data on teachers' perspectives and the "micro-politics" (Ball, 1987) of City Road was generated but has only been included in this thesis as dictated by my desire to understand the experiences of my case study pupils. eg. concerning staff responses to accusations of teacher racism (Chapter 6).

Throughout this work the importance of teachers' perspectives has been demonstrated and there is a powerful argument for additional research which focuses upon teachers as participants who are actively engaged in the negotiation of educational opportunity. Any reforms which aspire to increasing the realization of each pupils' potential will be given meaning through the actions of individual teachers at classroom level. More research on the day-to-day problems which teachers experience, and the solutions which they employ, seems essential if we are to progress further towards the goal of equality of educational opportunity.

## CONCLUSION

Although this thesis reports a case study of a single inner-city comprehensive its findings have relevance beyond the walls of City Road School. The study adds to a small but important series of school ethnographies which have focused upon particular aspects of the educational process through the detailed study of individual settings.

Like all schools, in Hammersley's (1980: 268) terms, City Road was something of a "peculiar world", yet the processes which led a minority of its pupils to academic success (while the majority experienced 'failure') are unlikely to be wholly specific to that institution.

If any one message were to emerge from this study it would surely be that life in schools is extremely complex: in City Road teachers did not simply dictate subject options to pupils, they did not set out to devote themselves to 'able' pupils alone and rarely did any teacher approach their job with a perspective which could be described as crudely 'racist'. Yet in the day-to-day interaction which fashioned the school careers of my case study pupils it was true that the options process acted as a form of academic selection, the 'able' pupils were differentiated from their peers, and West Indian pupils were relatively disadvantaged within the age grade.

These patterns of experience were the result of interaction between actors (staff and pupils) who perceived the school, and each other, in ways which were not only different, but often conflictual. The school careers of my case study pupils were therefore the result of countless negotiations with their peers and teachers. It is in this sense that educational opportunity was negotiated within City Road. As Woods (1983: 11) has stated, "school life is a continuous process of negotiation", a process which we must understand a great deal more clearly if the goal of equality of educational opportunity is ever to be realized.

#### NOTE TO CHAPTER 7

1. Recent Government proposals on a National Curriculum have been presented as an attempt to "raise standards" and reduce the diversity between what is taught in different schools (Hansard 24th July 1987; DES, 1987). At the time of writing (late 1987) there is very little detail available from the Department of Education and Science concerning how the National Curriculum is likely to operate within schools. What is apparent from the Government's consultation document is that some reduced form of options choice is likely to remain within the centrally defined curriculum framework. For example, concerning different language, science, humanity (Geography and History) and aesthetic subjects within the "foundation curriculum", as well as in relation to a range of possible "additional" subjects such as a second science, a second modern language, History, Geography, Religious Studies, Home Economics, Art and Drama (DES, 1987: 5-8). As I have noted in Chapter 4, there are very great differences in academic status between some of these subjects and it seems likely therefore that curricula differentiation at 14-plus, of the kind experienced in City Road Comprehensive during this study, will continue.

## APPENDIX 1: A field work chronology

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My research diary records that I visited City Road Comprehensive during 256 school days: spread across 77 weeks of term (between January 1984 and December 1985). This averages approximately 3 visits per week. This figure may help the reader to appreciate the frequency with which I entered the setting but it does not convey a great deal about the field work itself.

The following chronology is offered as a guide to my main concerns during the data collection process. It would be pedantic (and largely unhelpful to the reader) if I were to list every encounter which I recorded in my research field notes. However, some knowledge of my principal sources of data at each stage of the project is necessary if the reader is to understand something of the empirical base upon which this thesis has been built.

I wish to emphasize that this chronology is meant only as a guide to my principal interests and sources of data during the intensive field work phase of the research project: it is not an exhaustive list of all interviewees, observational settings or areas upon which I gathered information. For example, the industrial action which took place during my field work was not an area which I intended to study (it does not continually re-appear in this chronology), yet, because of my other concerns, I did collect a great deal of information concerning the meaning and consequences of the action for the organization of the school and the experiences of its staff and pupils.

The chronology is perhaps best understood as a thumbnail sketch of 'what I did, and when I did it'. The information is presented in note form and broken down by each academic term: for reasons of clarity the data sources are ordered by topic (eg. option negotiations) and method (eg. interview) within each term.

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THE AGE GRADE'S 3rd YEAR: SPING TERM January-April 1984

The first weeks of term were spent getting to know the setting, introducing myself to key actors, finding out about the options system and negotiating a sample. This was a time when the option choices were being spoken about in general terms but no specific negotiations had begun, ie. the 'pre-option' phase. I immediately began to gather data on the actors' expectations of the process to come.

I. ORIENTATIONSTAFF INTERVIEWS

Spoke with the Head, Senior teacher and Head of 3rd year.  
We discussed the school, the pupils in the research age grade and possible case study forms.

The Heads of Mathematics and Modern Languages on the introduction of setting in the lower school: its rationale and criteria.  
Also discussed their views on the patterns of pupil choice which affected their subjects.

Met three year tutors, dicussed the research and their tutees.  
Arranged observations.

Met the other year tutors, asked permission of another tutor to observe his form.

OBSERVATIONS

Sat-in on form periods of four of the eight mixed ability forms in the age grade: assessing their suitability for case study.

II. PRE-OPTION WORKINTERVIEWS

STAFF: Head, Senior teacher, pastoral Head of 3rd year, the Head of Guidance and tutors of 3 case study forms: on their role in, and expectations of, the options system.

Members of Senior staff on the recent history of options choice in City Road.

PUPILS: All pupils in three case study forms, ie. each of the 69 members of 3A,C & D were seen in small groups to discuss their perceptions of the options at this point. We also spoke about their knowledge of, and attitude towards, set and mixed ability teaching, likes/dislikes of subjects and teachers and their hopes for the future in school.

Class discussions on option preparations with each case study form.

OBSERVATIONS

Options preparation during form periods in 3A,C & D: Work by tutors and 3 departmental presentations to pupils in 3D.

Watched the case study forms in their meetings with the Head of Guidance.

Parents Option Explanation Evening: Senior staff presentation of the options system to 3rd years' parents.

#### DOCUMENTARY

Various documentation was collected including;

- \* The City Road Options Booklet (for 3rd year pupils).
- \* School handbooks for staff and parents.
- \* Copies of 3rd year attendance registers.
- \* A breakdown of the age grade by ethnic origin (by the Year Head).

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#### 3rd YEAR: SUMMER TERM April-July 1984

This term was the most frantic of the entire research project. I was in the school almost every day, initially to observe the negotiation of option choices between the staff, pupils and parents. Later in the term I was concerned to explore the participants' views of the process having officially finalized the decisions.

#### I. OPTION NEGOTIATIONS

##### INTERVIEWS

STAFF: The Head, Deputies and Senior Teacher on the re-organization of the process in response to the industrial action. Their expectations of departmental, pupil and parental responses.

Five of the eight 3rd year tutors (3 in great detail) on the re-organized system and their tutees' experience of it.

PUPILS: Day-to-day contact with pupils in form, around the school and as they prepared for official option meetings with senior staff and parent(s).

##### OBSERVATIONS

Assemblies and form periods as the staff presented the re-organized options system to the pupils and encouraged them to participate.

THE OFFICIAL MEETINGS: 33 of the 38 official option meetings which involved pupils from my case study forms.

The logistics of being a single researcher covering three forms meant that I had to miss some meetings. However, I ensured that I saw a range of meetings which involved pupils of every gender, ethnic origin and level of 'ability' from each of the three forms. I was also able to observe each member of senior staff who participated in the system, including the Head.

MISCELLANEOUS: Day-to-day interactions around the school, eg. in corridors and form rooms: included 'informal negotiations' as form tutors and members of senior staff queried pupils provisional choices. I witnessed 26 such challenges which involved case study pupils (I know from documentary sources that at least 35 members of 3A,C & D were seen in this way).

#### DOCUMENTARY

I made copies of the following;

- \* Letters from the Headteacher and Tutors to parents: on the industrial action and the options.
- \* All departmental assessments on members of my 3 case study forms.
- \* Pupil choices within the option pattern which went forward to senior staff (3 forms).
- \* School data on departmental take-up rates at different points in the options process.
- \* Senior staff recommendations for pupils in 3 case study forms.

## II. POST-OPTIONS

### INTERVIEWS

STAFF: Members of the senior staff on their perceptions of how the options had worked out and their thoughts on the age grades' future in the 4th & 5th years.

Form tutors of the case study forms: discussed their experiences of the options, views of their tutees 'choices' and expectations in the upper school.

The Head of, and/or a senior teacher within, the following departments;  
English, Sciences, Geography, History, Religious Education,  
Community Studies, Craft Design and Technology, Technical  
Graphics and Guidance.

On their role in and perceptions of the options system. Also information on the use of setting in the upper school, their examination courses and entry procedures.

With the Year Head I went through detailed histories of all pupils in 3A, C & D plus each ethnic minority pupil in the age grade.

PUPILS: 35 members of the case study forms were interviewed concerning their experience of the option system and their expectations of the upper school. At this time it was often difficult to arrange interviews in advance: the industrial action and the point in the school year forced me to choose pupils from forms at very little notice. Despite such limitations I managed to see interviewees who represented the full range of experiences during the options process and included each gender and ethnic group in the case study forms.

### OBSERVATIONS

Form periods in 3 forms. Continued focus on pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil relations.

Parents Open Evening: 3rd pupils' year reports were available to parents at this occasion. I circulated between case study forms watching meetings between staff and parents and talking informally with pupils, parents and year staff.

### SOCIOMETRY

Following a pilot with another 3rd year form, questionnaires on friendship choices and peer relations were administered to the 3 case study forms.

I also gave 3A, C & D a questionnaire to check on the craft subjects which

they experience of in the lower school.

#### DOCUMENTARY

I made copies of the following;

- \* "Final choice" figures for the entire age grade by individual teaching group for the following academic year.
- \* Third year reports to parents for each pupil in 3 case study forms.

#### 4th YEAR: AUTUMN TERM September-December 1984

As the research age grade settled into life in the upper school I wanted to study the ways in which the school presented this point in their pupil careers. I also spent a great deal of time checking for instances where pupils' fourth year options did not match the official data supplied at the end of the third year and studying the experiences of those pupils who had just joined the school.

#### INTERVIEWS

Continued option negotiation: I spoke with members of senior staff, subject departments, form tutors and pupils about the movement of some tutees into fourth year options which were different to the ones officially listed at the end of their third year.

New pupils: A number of pupils joined the research age grade at this point and six entered my case study forms. I saw each individually: we discussed their educational careers to date, how their City Road options had been negotiated and their impressions of the school.

The school's Educational Welfare Officer on fourth year cases, the role of the EWO and the criteria for official action.

#### OBSERVATIONS

I sat with the senior teacher as 18 pupils began their fourth year by querying one or more of their option choices.

The negotiation of 5 new pupils' option choices.

Assemblies and form periods: the presentation of the transition into the upper school.

I attended a one day INSET course for the school's staff: "Micro-computers in Education".

4th Year Parents Evening: Spent most of the evening with one of my case study tutors as he met tutees' parents.

#### DOCUMENTARY

\* Full listings of each fourth year teaching set: collected by the Headteacher at my request.

\* Copies of Interim reports to parents of my 3 case study forms.

\* Governors' Awards presented this term.

4th YEAR: SPRING TERM January-March 1985

I had no particular focus during this term, rather I maintained my contacts with the forms and their teachers and began work preparing for a series of more detailed interviews with a smaller sample of case study pupils.

During this term there was an 'incident' which I found to be of very great interest in relation to the micro-politics of the staff body. However, the theme which developed as I wrote up this thesis was such that 'the incident' was not crucial to the study and given certain ethical considerations I have chosen not to include it in this work.

## INTERVIEWS

Miscellaneous: pupils and teachers during the day-to-day of life in the school.

Case study tutors on their pupils in the upper school to date.

The Head and a 'Section 11' teacher on multi-cultural work in the school.

'The incident': interviews with pupils and several members of the staff body.

## OBSERVATIONS

In relation to 'the incident'.

Miscellaneous, including continued interest in assemblies and form periods: I especially focused on peer relations and official attempts at motivation.

## SOCIOMETRY

Questionnaires to all pupils in my 3 case study forms on friendship choice and peer relations.

## DOCUMENTARY

\* Copies of the entire age grade's responses to a 'Section 11' questionnaire designed and administered within the school. The questions were largely concerned with family ethnicity and language use in the home.

4th YEAR: SUMMER TERM April-July 1985

In order to gain more detailed information on the pupils and their lives, both in and out of school, I prepared a fourth year interview schedule (Appendix 2). Because of its comparative length and the potentially sensitive nature of some of the issues which the interviews discussed, I decided to see each pupil individually. The restrictions of time forced a reduction in the numbers I could interview and I decided to drop 3D as a case study form. Even so, the interviews dominated my work during this term.

## INTERVIEWS

PUPILS: Carried out the 'structured' fourth year interviews with each

member of forms 4A & C (47 pupils).

STAFF: The Headteacher, Head of Year and 3 form tutors on the research age grade as 4th years and expectations of their future in the school.

The EWO: detailed update on cases in the research age grade.

MISCELLANEOUS: Pupils and staff (senior, year and departmental) on the expulsion of Wayne Johnson.

#### DOCUMENTARY

\* Copies of the end of year reports to the parents of 4th year pupils in my 2 case study forms.

#### THE 5th YEAR: AUTUMN TERM September-December 1985

During the final term of my intensive field work most of my time was dedicated to a study of three 5th year teaching groups: I wanted to understand how the teachers and pupils negotiated each others' demands in a classroom situation and to see how this might relate to some of the things which the fourth year interviews had highlighted.

#### OBSERVATIONS

3 weeks of lessons with the top English set, the bottom English set and a mixed ability Technical Graphics group.

Miscellaneous: form periods, assemblies and around the school.

#### INTERVIEWS

re the lesson observations:

3 Subject teachers (and a supply teacher) on their groups and the lessons which I attended.

Pupils spoken with before, during and after the lessons: informal conversations concerning the work and the life of the groups.

Miscellaneous:

STAFF: Senior staff, Year Head and 2 case study form tutors on the research age grade; its' past in the school and current experiences and problems.

The senior member of staff responsible for City Road examination entries: the system and departmental approaches within the school.

PUPILS: In addition to continued informal contact with case study pupils, further session with school-based members of West Indian clique (contacted via the now expelled Wayne Johnson).

#### SOCIOMETRY

Sentence completion items and a questionnaire on friendship choice to each member of forms 5A & D.

#### DOCUMENTARY

\* Detention records for the research age grade from the beginning of their

third year to the last day of this term inclusive.

\* Provisional examination entries for the entire age grade.

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5th YEAR: SPRING AND SUMMER TERMS      January-July 1986

Although my intensive field work ended in December 1985 I kept in contact with the teachers and pupils until the end of the research age grade's compulsory education. In addition to telephone calls and the occasional chance meeting on the street or bus, I paid three more visits to the school during the Spring and Summer terms.

**INTERVIEWS**

**STAFF:** The senior teacher, Year Head and form tutors: developments in the school, the progress of the case study forms and examination expectations.

**PUPILS:** Informal conversations with members of the case study forms: Easter leaving, examination and job prospects.

**DOCUMENTARY**

- \* Final examination entries for the age grade.
- \* Details of all 'Easter leavers'.
- \* Full examination results for the age grade (GCE, CSE and combined 16-plus examinations).

## APPENDIX 2: The 'structured' fourth year interviews

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At the beginning of the Summer term in their fourth year I addressed both of my case study forms and explained that I would be seeing each pupil individually before the end of the school year. All the interviews were conducted in a private office during morning "form periods". This allowed me approximately twenty-five minutes per interview, which proved to be adequate on almost all occasions. Where I felt that further time was necessary I was often able to see pupils informally around the school, without giving the impression to their peers or staff that I was interested in certain pupils more than others.

My interviews with staff and pupils were usually quite informal and very loosely structured. In contrast, the interviews at the end of the pupils' fourth year followed a common schedule of questions. This level of structuring was necessary for several reasons; most importantly, I wanted to elicit information on many different subjects and my desire to get through both case study forms at a similar point in their pupil careers limited the amount of time I could allow for each interview.

The schedule reflected common practice in interview technique, beginning with factual points and leading to more sensitive issues towards the end of the interview, by which time it is hoped that the interviewee is more relaxed and likely to trust the interviewer with 'delicate' information. In fact, by the time I carried out the interviews I had known most the pupils involved for approximately eighteen months, and had built up good relationships of trust with many of them. In addition, they were familiar with my use of the tape recorder and, most importantly, they knew from experience that I did not pass on any information to their peers or members of staff.

The remainder of this appendix contains detail of the interview schedule itself and the areas of interest which lay behind its construction.



### AREAS OF INTEREST

Listed below are the main areas of interest which I sought to probe during the structured interviews. Under each heading I have included a list of numbers; these refer to the questions which could generate data of relevance to that particular topic.

\* SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS Question 1.

\* GENDER & RACE/ETHNICITY Neither of these were explicitly probed so as to avoid 'leading' pupils into assigning them greater importance than they might otherwise have done. However, data of relevance to each could emerge through several other categories in the schedule, eg. labelling, friendship patterns, societal context and adaptations (see below).

\* HOME SITUATION Questions 1, 2, 15, 16, 19

These questions probed home situation of pupils in terms of the number of adults and siblings with whom they lived. Data was also collected concerning the reported attitudes of these people to certain issues which the school saw as important.

\* LABELLING Questions 7, 7a, 8, 9, 10, 12, 21

These were the main questions which focused upon the pupil's relationship with teachers. Further information on the pupil's experiences of school and perceived 'labels' in the eyes of staff could also emerge from the following category.

\* OPTIONS EXPERIENCE/LEVEL OF CURRICULUM PLACEMENT Questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 6b, 13, 13b

The aim of these questions was to examine any differences in the pupils' experience of school which might relate back to their progress in the subject options system of the third year.

\* FRIENDSHIP PATTERNS Questions 14, 15, 16, 18, 20

\* ADAPTATIONS TO THE COMMUNICATED SCHOOL VALUE SYSTEM Questions 5, 6, 6a, 6b, 7, 7a, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 12a, 13a, 14, 15, 16, 19, 21

These questions referred to pupils' perspectives and actions which might place

them in harmony or conflict with the norms and values of the school, as officially communicated through media such as assemblies, talks by form tutors and school handbooks.

\* SOCIETAL (EXTRA-SCHOOL) CONTEXT Questions 17, 18, 19, 20

More data on the pupil's life outside school, which may have influenced their perception of the City Road.

THE SCHEDULE

The following is a list of the questions included in the fourth year structured interview schedule. The questions are listed in the order which I usually asked them. However, where the pupil's response to one question included data of relevance to another I would follow the flow of the conversation and try to incorporate related questions at that point in the interview.

Most questions were listed as a number of points to be raised but some were always worded in a particular way in order to avoid 'leading' pupils to a particular type of response. In some cases this also helped to make the meaning of the question clear. Such questions are quoted verbatim.

1. Number of people in the household, relationship to pupil and their occupation(s).
2. Question on any siblings other than in Qu.1. Occupation(s).
3. Confirm which optional subjects are being studied (Compare to current record of timetable).
4. Pupil's view of subjects: "Are any of those different to what you'd expected?" "Why?"
5. Is school now better or worse than before subject specialization?
6. Pupil's anticipated level of examination at 16 (CSE/GCE/16-plus)
- 6a. Pupil's attitude to anticipated level: Any strong feelings?
- 6b. Any views on the value of exams/qualifications.
7. Feelings generally about teachers in the school.
- 7a. Any particularly liked or disliked? Why?
8. "How would you define a 'Good' teacher?"

9. "What do you think teachers think about you?"
  10. "Do you think any groups of pupils are treated differently by teachers?  
... Do they like or dislike any pupils in particular?"  
NB. If any individual pupils are mentioned by name: "Why them?"
  11. "Do you think that the school is too strict?"  
If so, any rules noted in particular?
  12. "A few months ago some people were sent home because of their uniform.  
What did you think about that?"
  - 12a. Note whether there is anything of 'symbolic' value/interest in pupil's  
dress? If so, probe.
  13. "How much homework are you given in each subject?"
  - 13a. Pupil's view of homework: Legitimate demand? eg. "Do you think it's right  
that the school expects you to do some more work at home?"
  - 13b. "How important do teachers seem to think homework is?"
  14. "Before the [teachers'] strike started, did you ever do anything in  
school after the normal school day had finished?"  
If prompt necessary, eg. clubs, sport, school teams.  
If so: which, how regularly and with whom..."With any of  
your friends?"
  15. "Do you ever take time off school when you're not ill?"  
If yes: regularity, where do they go, with whom?  
Also probe parental knowledge/reaction.
  16. "Have you ever got your mark [as present in the form register] and then  
left the school?"  
If yes: regularity, where do they go, with whom?  
Also probe parental knowledge/reaction.
- "Okay, now I want to ask you a few questions about what you do when you're  
not in school."
17. Any paid work?  
If yes: hours, pay, use of wages?
  18. "What do you do when you're not in school or doing homework?"  
Social life: Pubs, disco's etc? With whom?
  19. "Do you smoke?"  
For how long, how many, parental knowledge/reaction. Ever been  
caught in school?
  20. "Do you know anyone who has sniffed glue or taken drugs?"  
"Have you?"
  21. Any additional questions arising out of pupil career to date,  
eg. probing pupil's perception of any particular event observed or  
reported which concerned them.

### APPENDIX 3: Sample definitions and sizes

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The following is a short summary of the main groupings which were 'sampled' in City Road: in each case I will outline the definition and purpose of the sample.

#### 1. THE RESEARCH POPULATION

In the broadest sense my research was concerned with the experiences of all pupils who were part of the City Road 3rd, 4th or 5th year in the academic years 1983/4, 1984/5 and 1985/6 respectively, ie. all members of the pupil age grade from which my case study forms were drawn.

The research population was constantly changing as pupils joined or left the City Road pupil roll. However, the overall composition of the age grade (in terms of the relative sizes of groups based on gender and ethnic origin) remained much the same throughout the research.

For certain calculations it was necessary to know the absolute number of pupils who were ever a part of the research age grade. Such calculations were based on the 'research population' and refer to the pupils counted in Table A.3/1.

I used school documents to make counts of the pupils on the roll at four separate points during the field work. Although I cannot guarantee that no pupils joined and then left the roll between any of the counts, no such pupil has come to light in any of the lists of teaching groups, examination entries, awards, detentions etc. which I have collected during the research.

As I noted in Chapter 1, it was not feasible for me to collect data on the social class background of all pupils in the research age grade. The school's records on each pupil did not include such data as a matter of course and I judged that a questionnaire to the entire age grade would not produce reliable information. However, during the 'structured' fourth year interviews I was able to collect social class data from those pupils who were members of my case study forms at that time.

TABLE A.3/1: THE TOTAL SIZE OF THE RESEARCH POPULATION

Totals	211 pupils		
	120 male	(57% of the sample)	
	91 female	(43% of the sample)	
By Ethnic Origin			
WHITE	168 pupils	(80% of pupils in the sample)	
	92 male	(77% of males in the sample)	
	76 female	(84% of females " " " )	
WEST INDIAN			
	19 pupils	(9% of pupils in the sample)	
	10 male	(8% of males in the sample)	
	9 females	(10% of females " " " )	
ASIAN	14 pupils	(7% of pupils in the sample)	
	11 male	(9% of males in the sample)	
	3 females	(3% of females " " " )	
MIXED RACE			
	10 pupils	(5% of pupils in the sample)	
	7 males	(6% of males in the sample)	
	3 females	(3% of females " " " )	

That data is discussed further and presented in section 4 below.

## 2. THE 'OPTIONS PROCESS' SAMPLE

My desire to understand the processes at work during the subject options stage in the pupils' school careers underlay many of my early decisions concerning the choice of case study forms and the selection of key areas of interest in observational and interview settings (See Chapter 1 and Appendix 1). In order to highlight some of the processes at work during "the options" and to establish the validity of my case study forms as being reasonably representative of the research population, some breakdown of the option experiences of a larger proportion of the research age grade was attempted. For example, in the breakdown of subject take-up rates among pupils of each gender (Chapter 4 and Appendix 5). The calculations were based upon all pupils who were present in the City Road 3rd year THROUGHOUT the options process, ie. between January and July 1984. This sample is detailed in Table A.3/2.

## 3. THE LONGITUDINAL SAMPLE

This sample was used to explore the processes which surrounded decision making concerning the two key points in pupil career which bounded the field work, ie. the negotiation of optional subjects and examination entry. This sample was slightly different to the 'options process' sample because of the pupils who left the school after their third year.

By the time the final examination entries were submitted to the various examining bodies (February 1986) a number of pupils who had been in City Road throughout the options process had left the school roll. Reasons for leaving the roll varied from expulsion and pregnancy to simple changes of address. Such pupils rightly appeared in the 'options process' sample since they experienced the whole of the subject option machinery in the school. However, they did not figure in the City Road examination entries and therefore were excluded from calculations which

TABLE A.3/2: THE COMPOSITION OF THE OPTIONS PROCESS SAMPLE

Totals	185 pupils		
		111 male	(60% of the sample)
		74 female	(40% of the sample)
By Ethnic Origin			
WHITE	147 pupils		(79% of pupils in the sample)
		86 male	(77% of males in the sample)
		61 female	(82% of females " " " )
WEST INDIAN	17 pupils		(9% of pupils in the sample)
		9 male	(8% of males in the sample)
		8 females	(11% of females " " " )
ASIAN	13 pupils		(7% of pupils in the sample)
		11 male	(10% of males in the sample)
		2 females	( 3% of females " " " )
MIXED RACE	8 pupils		(4% of pupils in the sample)
		5 males	(5% of males in the sample)
		3 females	(4% of females " " " )

TABLE A.3/3: THE COMPOSITION OF THE LONGITUDINAL SAMPLE

Totals	179 pupils		
	109 male	(61% of the sample)	
	70 female	(39% of the sample)	
By Ethnic Origin			
WHITE	143 pupils	(80% of pupils in the sample)	
	85 male	(78% of males in the sample)	
	58 female	(83% of females " " " )	
WEST INDIAN	16 pupils	(9% of pupils in the sample)	
	8 male	(7% of males in the sample)	
	8 females	(11% of females " " " )	
ASIAN	13 pupils	(7% of pupils in the sample)	
	11 male	(10% of males in the sample)	
	2 females	( 3% of females " " " )	
MIXED RACE	7 pupils	(4% of pupils in the sample)	
	5 males	(5% of males in the sample)	
	2 females	(3% of females " " " )	



related gender, ethnic origin and options experience to examination entry and performance.

The 'longitudinal' sample therefore included all pupils in the research age grade who were present THROUGHOUT the entire chronology of the research: they were on the school roll as "3rd years" in January 1984 (when the options began), and as "5th years" in February 1986 (when the final examination entries were sent off). This sample is detailed in Table A.3/3.

#### 4. THE CASE STUDY FORMS

Two mixed ability form groups were studied intensively during the two years of the field work. A third form was also studied in detail during the options process. These forms offered an opportunity to study the experiences of pupils between the ages of 13 and 16 in a more detailed and intimate way than would be possible for a larger sample of pupils. The criteria which influenced the negotiation and selection of the case study forms are set out in detail in Chapter 1.

Some members of the case study forms did not appear in either the 'Options process' or 'Longitudinal' samples, for example, because they left the school during the field work or joined the roll after the preparations for the options had begun. However, these pupils' presence in the form and their experiences of school were no less important for that. Therefore they have been included in discussions of the case study forms and the processes at work in City Road Comprehensive.

As I noted in section 1 above, I was only able to gather reliable information on the social class backgrounds of those pupils present in my two final case study forms at the time of the 'structured' fourth year interviews. Table A.3/4 sets out the social class background of each pupil in forms A and C who were present throughout the entire period of the research field work. Where I have data on other case study pupils who joined or left the forms during the field work, that too is presented.

The pupils' social class was judged by locating their fathers' occupation in

TABLE A.3/4: THE SOCIAL CLASS BACKGROUNDS OF CASE STUDY PUPILS IN TWO MIXED ABILITY FORMS\*

Social Class	<u>Members of the case study forms present in City Road throughout the research field work</u>	
	<u>FORM A</u>	<u>FORM C</u>
I-III(N)	Kathy Day Ben Watson	Peter Hamilton Surinda Lail
III(M)-V	Rafiq Ali Arif Aslam Simon Baines Denise Burton Paul Dixon Sharon French Julie Goddard Carol Hill Shirley Kelly Vicky Mitchell Janet Nelson Stephanie Page Lee Rourke Jimmy Simms Dawn Sutton	Tony Appleby Julie Bexson Anthony Clarke Simon Evans Eric Garratt Duncan Newham John Nillson Kevin Pierce Neil Poxon
Other**	Sean Barker Jane Bird Michael Cooper Neil Grey John Perry Darren Priest Ashley Roberts	Sandra Garner Rita Lewis Joanne Matthews Evelyn Mills James Murray Trevor Smith Ian Taylor Charley Thompson

Not present throughout the research field work

I-III(N)		Susan Brown [joined roll] Elaine Dwyer [joined & left roll]
III(M)-V		Tracey Sharp [joined roll]
Other**	Diane Flowers [left roll]	Wayne Johnson [expelled]

Notes: \* based on the classification of 'Socio-economic class' (OPCS, 1980: cv-cxix).

\*\* 'Other' includes those pupils for whom no classification was possible, eg. because they came from one-parent families (no father), had neither parent in work or whose father was employed in an occupation, such as the HM Forces, which was not classified in terms of 'Socio-economic class'.

terms of the "Socio-economic class" classification reproduced in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys publication "Classification of occupations: 1980" (OPCS, 1980: cv-cxix).

#### APPENDIX 4: Mixed ability teaching nationally and in City Road

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Although this case study does not aim to generate any universally generalizable findings it is necessary to gain some impression of how City Road compares with other comprehensives in certain respects. For example, the inner-city location of the school means that some of the findings will speak with certainty only to schools in similar social locations.

There is no definitive data on the patterns of mixed ability teaching which existed in English comprehensives at the time of my research in City Road. However, limited data is available on the extent and nature of mixed ability teaching up to the late 1970s: a number of different surveys of school practice have tended to reveal a similar pattern of mixed ability teaching. This is outlined below.

##### The extent and nature of mixed ability teaching

The question 'How many schools use mixed ability teaching?' may seem straight forward enough, but in fact begs a number of other questions such as 'What is mixed ability teaching?' and even 'Which type of school?'

'Mixed ability' can mean different things to different people but generally it is understood to mean the teaching of a subject to groups which each contain pupils who are representative of the whole ability range in that school (although in practice it is common for some pupils at the extreme lower end of the ability range to be taught separately in 'remedial' groups). In view of the very important pedagogic, resource and intake differences between the various types of school which make up the "three systems" of "private", "mass" and "fringe" education in this country (Davies & Evans, 1984: 156; original emphasis) I shall limit my discussion to state maintained comprehensive schools. Unfortunately, even limiting myself to comprehensives is unsatisfactory given the very different histories and conditions which relate to schools sharing that same official title, nevertheless for my

purposes it is the only practical solution given the available data.

Data from the 1970s indicates that at least a third of English comprehensives used mixed ability teaching as a pupil grouping strategy for a significant part of their teaching. However, the available figures show that the use of mixed ability teaching was frequently limited to particular age ranges within the comprehensives and that certain subjects were often excluded even from those arrangements.

Mixed ability teaching was most often found to be concentrated around the earliest years of secondary schooling, with increased setting as the pupils moved through the age structure of the school.

[The majority of comprehensives who replied] "taught mixed ability classes in year 1, but the extent of mixed ability teaching then decreased gradually."

Dooley, Smith and Kerry (1977: 3)

"What stands out above all is the predominance of the first-yeariness of mixed ability grouping (at around 30 per cent of our map [sample], 40 per cent if any two from maths, science or modern language are exempted)..."

Brian Davies and John Evans (1984: 161)

This pattern was also found in the most recent attempt to quantify the extent of mixed ability teaching in all English comprehensives with an age range of 11/12 - 16/18. The data was gathered in 1976 by members of HM Inspectorate and reported in the discussion paper 'Mixed Ability Work in Comprehensive Schools' (HMI, 1978). The HMI findings are summarized in Table A.4/1.

The HMI figures for 1976 indicate that 35% of English comprehensives within the stated age range taught "most subjects" (ie. excluding not more than two subjects) to mixed ability groups in the first year of secondary education. However this figure fell to 23% when teaching mixed ability in both the 1st AND 2nd years and to only 11% for the first three years inclusive.

Table A.4/1 also demonstrates the sharp decline in mixed ability teaching which follows the choice of subject options (made in the majority of state comprehensives

TABLE A.4/1: MIXED ABILITY TEACHING IN ENGLISH COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS  
BY PUPIL YEAR GROUP IN 1976  
(categories are not exclusive\*: percentages)

	Pupil age grade (Years)			
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th & 5th
"Most subjects" taught to mixed ability groups **	35%	23%	11%	2%
(N)=	806	545	261	47

Source: Adapted from HMI (1978) Mixed Ability Work in Comprehensive Schools : A discussion paper by a working party of Her Majesty's Inspectorate London, HMSO, p.11

Notes:

\* The percentages are not exclusive, ie. the 806 schools who taught "most subjects" to mixed ability groups in the first year includes all those who also taught mixed ability higher up the age range, as well as those who ONLY taught mixed ability to year 1 pupils.

\*\* "Most subjects" was defined as meaning "that not more than two subjects were excluded from mixed ability organisation in the curriculum of any one year group." HMI (1978: 11)

at the end of the 3rd year) in preparation for specialization leading to external examinations at 16+. Only 2% of comprehensives maintained mixed ability teaching for "most subjects" through to the end of the fifth year.

It should be noted that the data in Table A.4/1 only shows the extent of mixed ability teaching across the entire curriculum in 1976 and the presence of only three subjects which set by ability would exclude a school from these figures: a definition which is likely to seriously underestimate the true amount of mixed ability teaching which was taking place. For example, in many comprehensive schools it would take many more than three subjects to set by ability before they accounted for a genuine majority of curricula areas, yet this is not the impression given by the HMI's definition of "most subjects".

Smaller scale studies have tended to replicate the pattern of provision highlighted in Table A.4/1 but have also been able to move beyond simple totals to examine both the incidence of mixed ability teaching in particular subjects and the official rationale behind the adoption of mixed ability groups.

Within schools where the overall grouping strategy for any year group is mixed ability, certain subjects seem particularly likely to be set by ability, even during the first years of secondary education. The quotation from Davies and Evans above referred to the predominance of Mathematics, Science and Modern Languages as the subjects most likely to introduce selection first. This tendency has been noted by several studies, eg. Reid et al (1981: 7-9) and Dooley et al (1977: 5). Perhaps the most common reason which is given for this (by teachers and researchers) is that some subjects are simply not appropriate for mixed ability groups.

"... some [subjects] were perceived [by teachers] as generally suitable for a mixed ability approach and others regarded as largely unsuitable. The humanities, for example, were commonly viewed as providing excellent opportunities for mixed ability work, while modern languages and mathematics were considered to present problems which were regarded as insuperable by many of those who taught mixed ability classes."

Reid, Clunies-Ross, Goacher and Vile (1981: 7)

Reid and her colleagues identified several factors which seemed to be related

to some subjects' lack of suitability for mixed ability teaching in the opinion of teachers. Among the reasons proposed were the following,

- \* where there was an "absence of clear-cut criteria of correctness..."
- \* where the "perceived structure" of the subject was sequential, ie. as a series of logical steps building one on another,
- \* where the teacher was perceived as almost the only "major resource of the classroom..."
- \* where there was a "need for pupils to become familiar with a technical vocabulary, involving the understanding of concepts of increasing generality and abstractness..." (Reid et al, 1981: 8-9)

These justifications, couched in the technical language of the teachers as professional specialists, were not however the only factors which influenced the use of mixed ability grouping. The same authors also note the importance of the pressures felt by teachers as their pupils neared public examinations.

"... the extent to which examination pressures were felt at any particular stage by teachers determined their perceptions of the suitability of mixed ability work in a number of subjects. In English, history, geography, general science, music, domestic and technical studies, for example, where relatively few problems were reported in the early secondary years, teachers' awareness of examination requirements led them to reject mixed grouping when the need to prepare for these became apparent."

Reid, Clunies-Ross, Goacher and Vile (1981: 9)

Despite the liberal democratic views of mixed ability teaching as an aid to social justice, which appear so often in teachers' and Heads' explanations of why they adopted mixed ability at all (eg. Headteachers' responses to the Nottingham University questionnaire, reported in Dooley et al, 1977: 6-7), the pressure to produce the educational 'goods' in terms of examination passes is such that the majority of subject practitioners, regardless of the subjects' "structure" or "vocabulary", prefer to set by ability once examination courses begin. This fact may largely explain the dramatic decrease in the amount of mixed ability teaching which takes place in schools as the pupils move through the age grades.



It must be remembered that the reality of teaching in a comprehensive is by no means as simple as the above discussion might imply. Not every teacher can choose whether his/her groups will be mixed ability, certainly in City Road the capacity to set across the years' intake in any subject (both before and after the subject options process) was largely dependent upon the subjects' status in the eyes of the senior staff who controlled timetabling in the school. This situation does not appear to be exclusive to City Road.

"Only a vestigial remnant of our secondary schools aim for heterogenous grouping by design in the two years to 16+, though more achieve it, in effect, by the action of our bloated option systems, especially below the curricular salt"

Brian Davies and John Evans (1984: 158)

## CONCLUSIONS

The extent and nature of mixed ability teaching in England's comprehensives is by no means clear cut. However certain conclusions can be drawn;

1) In the late 1970s more than a third of English comprehensives used mixed ability teaching groups for a significant number of their pupils in at least some age grades. Given the HMI's definition of "most subjects", the continued spread of comprehensives since the last main study (and my scant knowledge of at least one LEA) it may be that the majority of such schools now fall into this group.

2) The use of mixed ability grouping is largely restricted to the early years of secondary schooling. With the start of examination courses following subject option choice, what mixed ability grouping remains in the 4th and 5th years is largely a matter of necessity rather than design.

3) Teachers of certain subjects often feel that their specialism is not appropriate for mixed ability groups, most commonly Mathematics, Science and Modern Languages. However, teachers in almost all subjects feel that selection is the most suitable strategy once examination courses begin.

City Road and the national picture

The three conclusions above would seem to indicate that City Road shared a number of characteristics with other English comprehensives in its grouping of pupils for teaching. In City Road all but three subjects (Mathematics, Science and Modern Languages) taught in mixed ability groups until the fourth year when, after subject options and with the push towards examinations, some form of setting became the goal of almost all departments. However, timetable allocations and the numbers of pupils opting made setting impossible in many subjects.

# APPENDIX 5: Subject option take-up by pupil gender

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The following tables list the proportion of male and female pupils who were finally placed in each optional subject in the City Road fourth year. Each subject is listed in descending order according to the proportion of male and female pupils who "opted" for it. The raw numbers are stated in parenthesis and the percentages are based upon the number of pupils present throughout the entire 'choice' process (ie. the 'options process' sample).

## MALE Subject Option take-up

1. History	57%	(63)
2. Physics	47%	(52)
3. Biology	42%	(47)
4. Geography	46%	(51)
5. Tech. Graphics	41%	(46)
6. Computer St.	27%	(30)
7. Chemistry	26%	(29)
8. Art	22%	(24)
9. Woodwork	19%	(21)
10. Applied Science	16%	(18)
=11. Religious Ed.	11%	(12)
=11. Metalwork	11%	(12)
13. Community St.	10%	(11)
=14. Double Comm.St.	7%	( 8)
=14. Drama	7%	( 8)
16. German	2%	( 2)
=17. House / Home Ec.	1%	( 1)
=17. Typing	1%	( 1)

## FEMALE Subject Option take-up

1. Biology	68%	(50)
2. Religious Ed.	46%	(34)
3. Child Care	39%	(29)
4. Typing	34%	(25)
5. History	32%	(24)
6. Community St.	27%	(20)
7. Art	26%	(19)
=8. Applied Science	18%	(13)
=8. German	18%	(13)
10. Geography	16%	(12)
11. Physics	15%	(11)
12. House./Home Ec.	14%	(10)
13. Dress/Textile	12%	( 9)
14. Chemistry	11%	( 8)
=15. Computer St.	5%	( 4)
=15. Tech. Graphics	5%	( 4)
=17. Double Comm.St	4%	( 3)
=17. Drama	4%	( 3)
19. French	3%	( 2)

## APPENDIX 6: The use of sociometric questionnaires in the study of peer friendship patterns

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### THE DESIGN AND USE OF SOCIOMETRIC QUESTIONNAIRES

Before discussing my own application of sociometric methods as a source of data on peer friendship choice, I wish to make clear some of the limitations and uses of the technique.

#### a) Sociometry as an interpretative method

'Sociometry' has been defined in a number of ways, but may typically be described as referring "generally to the measurement of social phenomena..." (Borgatta, 1968: 53). The method usually involves a researcher in administering one or more questionnaires to his/her subjects. The answers which are generated are then treated as 'data' to be used as part of the researcher's analysis.

Sociometric data may be presented in a variety of ways, for example, by the use of mathematical equations (Proctor and Loomis, 1951) or alternatively by using the data as the basis for some form of pictorial presentation. The latter has the advantage of presenting a great deal of information in a form which is both simple and dramatic. However, graphic presentations, such as sociograms (eg. Hargreaves, 1967: 11), are often most effective for "display rather than analytic purposes" (Borgatta, 1968: 55). Some writers have attempted to formalize the presentation of such data, eg. Northway (1940) and Forsyth and Katz (1946), but these methods continue to involve the researcher in a great deal of manipulation. For example, Forsyth and Katz's "matrix" technique (used by Ball, 1981) offers a method for graphically presenting a great deal of information, however, the final arrangement of cases depends upon the researcher's particular interests and subjective perceptions of the group.

Therefore despite the seemingly 'objective' character of some presentations of

sociometric data, the method is essentially interpretative. The 'correlations' and graphs which the data may generate prove nothing in isolation, sociometry has worth only as a technique to be used in conjunction with other data-gathering procedures. This point is not new, Moreno in what has become one of the most important works in the field of sociometry, established the need to combine a number of research strategies in order to support the 'validity' of sociometric techniques, ie. their ability to measure what they are supposed to measure (Moreno, 1953: 100-1), an argument echoed later by Stephen Ball:

"The combination of observation and sociometry provides a methodology which avoids the danger of creating an abstraction that reflects the nature and vagaries of the sociometric method rather than the realities of the classroom."

Stephen Ball (1981: 53)

These limitations in the use of sociometric techniques underlie my own use of such data in this thesis. I have tried to avoid presenting sociometric findings as in any way more 'concrete' than my own observational and interview data, indeed, I attach far more importance to the latter as reliable and valid techniques of data generation. I use sociometric data as further evidence of certain findings, to lend 'support' rather than to 'prove'.

#### b) The design and administration of sociometric questionnaires in this study

I used sociometric questionnaires principally as a further source of data on peer group friendship choices. In particular I hoped that the data would confirm any hypotheses which I might develop on the basis of observational and interview material (it was also possible that the responses might highlight patterns which I had not been aware of previously). I also anticipated that a matrix presentation (after Forsyth and Katz, 1946) would help formalize any case studies of pupil cliques which I might have wanted to include in a research report.

A great variety of approaches are possible within the broad area of sociometry,

but in constructing the questionnaires I aimed to follow certain basic ground rules. For example, I kept the language as simple as possible and tried to avoid ambiguity. I gave minimal instructions and clearly separated them from the questions.

Initially I administered two questionnaire sheets to each pupil in my three (options) case study forms (figures A.6/1 and A.6/2). Before this I had used another form group in the research age grade as a 'pilot'; to check that there was no confusion over the wording or requirements of the questionnaires. Before I gave out the sheets I addressed each form, requesting silence while they filled out the sheets, issuing the instructions verbally and emphasizing the fact that no one in the school would see the answer sheets.

Both questionnaires sought information on social contacts, investigating what Jennings (1947) termed the "psychegroup". The first questionnaire was of the "peer nomination" type (Cohen and Manion, 1983: 102). The pupils were given a sheet of paper with the questions written on it (figure A.6/1) and asked to write their answers on a separate blank sheet of A4 paper, which I supplied. I specified the 'setting' of each of the first two questions, to ensure that all pupils were clear about the contacts which I was interested in. My aim in constructing the first questionnaire was to highlight the structure of the social networks to which my case study pupils belonged (both within and beyond the form group). I allowed the pupils an unlimited choice; to stipulate a maximum number of responses not only denies them the chance to identify all members of larger networks (as Borgatta (1968) has noted), but may lead the respondents into assuming that they 'have' to list a certain number of pupils.

I administered the first version of Questionnaire I (figure A.6/1) twice, ie. in the third and fourth years of the age grade's secondary education. However, in their fifth year I made certain alterations (figure A.6/3). The problem with the original format was that by splitting the questions between in- and out of form friendships, I had no way of assessing the relative strength of the ties. For example, a pupil's closest ties might have been with peers in other forms, although

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WRITE YOUR NAME AND FORM AT THE TOP OF YOUR SHEET OF PAPER

Please read the following questions carefully, and write your answers  
on the sheet provided

Question 1 : In your form, who are your closest friends?

Question 2 : If you have any close friends in this school  
who are NOT in your form, please name them.

Question 3 : Please name your very best friend if you have  
one.

FIGURE A.6/1: The first version of Questionnaire I

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NAME ..... FORM 3C.....

HOW MUCH DO YOU LIKE EACH MEMBER OF YOUR FORM?

Circle the correct number beside each name

1 = like a lot  
2 = like a little  
3 = neither like nor dislike  
4 = dislike a little  
5 = dislike a lot

NAME	1	2	3	4	5
Tony Appleby					
Anthony Clarke					
Simon Evans					
Eric Garratt					
Peter Hamilton					
Wayne Johnson					
Surrinder Lail					
James Murray					
Duncan Newham					
John Nillson					
Kevin Pierce					
Neil Poxon					
Trevor Smith					
Ian Taylor					
Charley Thompson					
Julie Bexson					
Susan Brown					
Sandra Garner					
Rita Lewis					
Joanne Matthews					
Evelyn Mills					
Tracey Sharp					

FIGURE A.6/2:  
Questionnaire II



**PART ONE** : Please answer the following questions in the space provided at the bottom of this sheet

**Question 1:** Who are your closest friends in this school?

**Question 2:** In your form, who are your closest friends?

**Question 3:** Please name your very best friend if you have one.

Question number	Friends' full name and form

FIGURE A.6/3: The second version of Questionnaire I

they also had some friends in their own form whom they would have named in response to question 1. My interview and observational data allowed me to judge the importance of the different networks, but for the fifth year questionnaires I decided to change the wording accordingly. Hence, the second version began with a general question on friends in the school as a whole, and then included a form-based question which allowed me to continue the use of matrix presentations if I wished. I also decided to include space for the pupil's answers on the question sheet itself: the pattern of the third and fourth year responses suggested that the amount of free space on the question sheet would not act as a limitation on the number of answers.

The second type of questionnaire which I administered was of the roster and rating format. This involves the respondent in rating each person in a group along a predetermined scale (Figure A.6/2). I decided to use this, in conjunction with Questionnaire I, to ensure that I had data on negative choices (rejections) and relations between different cliques within each form. Also, by using a five point scale, the questionnaire maximized the potential for more sophisticated analysis of the data at a later point in the study. It could be argued that the third rating ('neither like nor dislike') might be used as a 'let out', but I judged it to be unwise to force a positive or negative rating where a child might genuinely have no strong feelings about a peer.

Questionnaire II successfully met its aims, however, it became clear that the questionnaire's potential did not justify its expense in time and materials. Hence, I did not use it in the pupils' fifth year: I gained very detailed information on inter-group relations within the forms through other ethnographic means, and these suggested that the form group was not as fundamental to social relations as I had originally assumed. This meant that the statistical manipulations of the data generated by the questionnaire were not only time-consuming but superfluous.

## APPENDIX 7: A sentence completion questionnaire: methods and findings

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### 1. THE USE OF SENTENCE COMPLETION ITEMS

The sentence completion technique is an established form of data generation which has been used in a number of previous ethnographic studies, for example, Hargreaves (1967) and Ball (1981). It has been argued that:

"Sentence completion techniques have the advantage of being simple to explain and easy to administer to large groups of subjects. Because of their novelty and the spontaneity of response which they encourage, they are generally well received by older and younger pupils alike. Exponents of the method claim that as well as revealing the conscious attitudes of the respondent, sentence completion may also expose unconscious feelings about which the subject may be quite unaware."

Louis Cohen (1976: 127)

It should be emphasized that sentence completion is a technique which aims to elicit data on pupil perspectives. The responses may tell the researcher something of how pupils see the world but, in order to gain a more complete picture, the method should only be used in conjunction with other means of data collection such as interview and observation.

I did not use sentence completion items until my research age grade entered their fifth year. Originally the technique had not struck me as being particularly useful, since responses to the same item could often be interpreted in conflicting ways. I felt that interview and observational data was far more reliable. However, having spoken with other researchers about their methodologies at an ESRC Summer School (1) I decided that the technique might offer a further means of testing certain hypotheses and generate certain data which conscious interview replies would not.

I decided to design a sentence completion questionnaire which focused upon various aspects of social relations within the school. I administered this, with the last of the peer nomination friendship questionnaires (see Appendix 6), to my

two case study forms during their fifth year. It should be emphasized that although I carefully considered the design, administration and interpretation of the sentence completion items, the exercise remained essentially speculative.

## 2. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

As with all my friendship questionnaires (Appendix 6) I gave both written and oral instructions to the pupils and asked them to write out their answers in silence. In addition to my usual reminders concerning the confidentiality of responses, I emphasized to the pupils that they should complete a sentence by adding the name of the fifth year pupil whom they felt was most suitable. I stated that they could name a pupil more than once if they wished and that they were not required to complete all the items if an appropriate nominee did not come to mind.

The questionnaire was made up of nine items, listed randomly as follows:

- ..... is very clever.
- ..... picks on other pupils.
- ..... is most like me.
- ..... is a favourite of some teachers.
- ..... is stupid.
- ..... is someone I would like to be friends with.
- ..... is bullied by other pupils.
- ..... is someone I don't like.
- ..... is picked on by some teachers.

## 3. THE RESPONSES

The patterns of response to sentence completion items are often open to many alternative explanations. For example, 230 nominations from a total of 284 (81% of the responses in the two forms) cited a pupil of the same gender as the nominator. It could be argued that this reflected the rarity of frequent social contact between

TABLE A.7/1: SENTENCE COMPLETION RESPONSES ACROSS TWO FIFTH YEAR FORMS

ITEM	NOMINEE OUTSIDE FORM			NOMINEE OF OPPOSITE SEX			ALL RESPONSES		
	Nominator		Total	Nominator		Total	Nominator		Total
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
Clever	9	9	18	0	2	2	24	19	43
Bully	21	11	32	0	6	6	22	11	33
Like me	6	2	8	1	0	1	14	7	21
Staff favour	11	11	22	3	0	3	21	14	35
Stupid	7	3	10	0	14	14	26	15	41
Like as Friend	2	2	4	0	0	0	2	2	4
Bullied	8	11	19	0	14	14	20	18	38
Disliked	11	16	27	2	1	3	22	17	39
Staff target	2	1	3	0	11	11	13	17	30
-----									
TOTAL	77	66	143	6	48	54	164	120	284

Note: 46 pupils completed the questionnaire, of which 27 were male and 19 were female

pupils of different genders within the school. Alternatively, it may indicate that the respondents unconsciously limited the populations from which they drew their answers (Table A.7/1 details the number and character of responses to each item).

Problems such as these severely limit the value of sociometric exercises and emphasize the need for a careful examination of possible interpretations and continued "data-source triangulation" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 198), ie. comparing the results of several different sources of data before accepting one perspective or analysis as valid. It was in this sense, as a supplementary data-source, that the pupils' replies to the sentence completion items revealed patterns of interest in relation to the significance of ethnicity in the school.

#### The nomination of West Indian pupils

When analysed by the ethnic origin of the nominee, West Indian pupils stood out in relation to two items; the first of these was,

..... picks on other pupils.

This item attracted close to the average number of nominations and was answered by 33 of the 46 pupils in the forms at the time (72%). The item stood out because all but one of the nominators cited pupils who were not members of their own form group. It might be argued that this was due to the nature of the question, ie. perhaps the pupils were reluctant to name a peer as a 'bully' if that person was in the room with them at the time and might find out. This possibility cannot be ruled out completely but seems most unlikely in view of the following factors,

- a) If they were afraid, why write any answer at all?
- b) This was the third sociometric exercise which the pupils had completed for me and they knew of no previous disclosure.
- c) There was a great deal of similarity in the nominations of pupils in two separate forms, with 29 of the 33 nominations (88%) shared between just three pupils, all of whom were West Indian.

24 of these nominations cited either Barry Clayton or Roger Haynes, ie. 73% of

all nominations in this item. The other West Indian pupil cited was a girl who was part of the female group which paralleled the West Indian male clique (see Chapter 6). Given that gender may have been associated with pupil nominations, it may be significant that 19 of the 22 nominations made by male pupils cited either Clayton or Haynes, ie. 86% of male nominations (and 70% of all males in the two forms at the time).

West Indian pupils also featured disproportionately in responses to the item,  
 ..... is picked on by some teachers.

This item attracted nominations from 30 of the 46 pupils in the two forms (ie. 65%); slightly less than the average number of responses per item. The majority of nominees were of the same sex and form group as the nominator, yet 15 of the 30 nominations made were of West Indian pupils (ie. 50% of nominees). These results should be compared with the fact that West Indians only ever accounted for approximately 10% of the entire research population and 15% of the two case study forms.

Clearly, in view of my previous warnings about the interpretation of sentence completion nominations these results do not 'prove' anything. However, that the pupils in my case study forms reflected West Indian ethnicity disproportionately in their answers to questions on conflict within the pupil body, and between teachers and pupils, lends support to the other observational and interview data (presented in Chapter 6) which highlighted the situation and adaptational responses of West Indian pupils in City Road comprehensive.

#### NOTE

1. "Strategies of Qualitative Research in the Study of Educational Settings" an ESRC Summer School held at the University of Warwick 22nd-26th July 1985. Sociometric methodologies were among several techniques discussed in workshops concerned with fieldwork methods and the analysis of qualitative data.

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